

# Vegan Prisoners Support Group

Newsletter, May 2002

## Coping Inside Prison

- a rough guide

by Greg Avery

This is a guide for vegan animal rights prisoners who may find themselves in prison for the first time. It is not meant to be the be all and end all of advice, just a guide.

The first few days are often the worst when it comes to food as one genuine problem that prisons have [as far as vegans go] is that they have many people who claim to be vegan, but then also eat meat etc when it suits them. So initially the prison will put you in this category and it takes a few days or in some cases weeks for them to realise that you are the genuine article. However, as long as the VPSG know where you are and it's been confirmed that you are either vegan or a strict ethical vegan, they will have already contacted the prison and faxed them regarding your diet and offered a reception pack of vegan toiletries from Honesty.

I can only really go on my experiences for writing as each prison is different and some parts you may relate to and others you may not.

In my experience you have to be very sceptical with anything deep fried like chips or even roast potatoes, etc in prison as they probably have been cooked in the same oil as meat. If they give you boiled potatoes make sure that the margarine is vegan.

There are some vegan margarines in the prison system but in the main they have non-vegan catering margarine, even if they are giving you, for example, the small 5g Bibo margarine



sachets, the same prison will be mainly using non-vegan margarine in everything else, eg all pastries.

They will quite often try to give you a burger or pastie that is not vegan as it may have an obscure ingredient like egg albumen in. First check the VPSG list as there are very few burgers in the prison system that are vegan. Obviously if you wish to query something then either miss that option and enquire in the office later or ask them, then stand to one side in the dinner queue while they deal with your query.

It is best to be polite and calm but firm, if you think that something is not vegan. Do not be fobbed off. If you were in a restaurant and the waiter gave you something that wasn't vegan you wouldn't accept it, so prison shouldn't be any different.

(Continued on page 5)

### *In this issue:*

- ✦ letters from prisoners
- ✦ recent news on arrests and trials
- ✦ 'Guide to coping in prison' by Greg Avery
- ✦ new VPSG website

## NEWS

### **Roche trial**

The trial of four defendants, charged with burglary of a few pieces of paper from a Roche office, has concluded with one acquittal and three found guilty. Madeleine Buckler, Sarah Gisborne and Kate Simpson are awaiting sentencing.

### **Burstow update**

All five of the defendants in the first Burstow trial were found guilty. Sentencing was deferred until the outcome of the second trial was known.

Of the five defendants in the second trial, one was found not guilty, but the jury could not come to a decision on the remaining four. A retrial has been scheduled for Monday 7 October, 2002.

### **Vegan Prisoner Support List**

An e-mail list is being set up that will give information on new prisoners, changes of address, and so on. If you are interested in being kept informed, then please send an e-mail with 'subscribe' in the subject line to:

[vpsl2002@yahoo.com](mailto:vpsl2002@yahoo.com)

## Contact VPSG

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# Prisoner News and Letters

## Neil Bartlett gets 4 years

On 12th March, 2002, Neil Bartlett received a 4-year prison sentence. Here is an extract from The Times newspaper:

*"An animal rights activist who made a series of hoax bomb threats, including one to Shell's London headquarters, was jailed yesterday for four years. Neil Bartlett, 28, unemployed, admitted making six calls between April and August last year. Bartlett made all the calls from a phone box in nearby Rustington, where he cycled to on his mountain bike. He was caught after police set up a camera inside the phone box and filmed him making the call to Shell on August 13, Chichester Crown Court was told."*

- The Times, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2002



## Letter from Neil

(written from HMP Lewes)

Dear Friends,

*"There is something to be learned from a rainstorm. When meeting with a sudden shower you try not to get wet and run quickly along the road. But doing such things as passing under the eaves of houses, you still get wet. When you are resolved from the beginning, you will not be perplexed, though you will still receive the same soaking. This understanding extends to everything".*

- Yamamoto Tsunetomo, and reflected upon in the film *Ghost Dog*

To have at last received my sentence is a relief; to have received one of four years is a reason to be cheerful. And I am! I was prepared for literally anything in this climate of state terrorism, so you can imagine I was buzzing after the sentence was read out. I'll be

## Mel Broughton

Hi everyone, well the last couple of months have been a bit problematic on the food front. The preparation and cooking of vegan food became a contentious issue and illustrated very clearly the problems of being in a minority group within the prison system.

The VPSG once again stepped into the breach and has been working hard to promote practical advice for the care of vegan prisoners of conscience.

Being in a tiny minority within the prison system sometimes means you have to shout to be heard, but you also have to be prepared to offer achievable and practical goals to the problems you face. Veganism is still something little understood in many prisons, but that can be changed with the right approach. Jo-Ann at the VPSG recently attended a meeting at the Mount to discuss issues surrounding the care of vegans (me) in the establishment. Representatives from the kitchen staff, the food services manager, environmental services manager and a Governor all sat down for over two hours to discuss improvements for the care of vegans in the prison.

Whilst there remains stubborn opposition from some kitchen management, and no magic wand solutions, the overall effect of such a meeting can only

out in April 04, earlier with parole, but to be honest the way I feel at the moment is that I'm free now! Once the drowning emotion of fear has gone you are free, free of the chaos of not knowing, that can so easily stifle your enjoyment of this free holiday. Now my night is over and a beautiful day has dawned.

The press report of my sentencing was typically sensationalist, particularly the local paper, which also omitted to say why Shell was targeted (they printed the words of the hoax call, missing out the last sentence which explained the reason for the action). They also printed the most awful photo of me - it's unimaginable! I'm in mid-cough with my cheeks all puffed out, I look a right thug! Still, if that's the worse thing that happened to me then I did have a good day! This was all designed to reduce public sympathy - the act's been done,



be a positive one. I have to say a big thank-you to VPSG for their dogged determination and intelligent handling of the problems that have arisen with the vegan food situation.

So problems aside I'm in very good spirits and keeping myself busy. I'm now part way through an Open University course in philosophy which is keeping the old grey matter active. I'm still a regular at the gym where my vegan energy continues to amaze as I fly around the circuit training course. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their wonderful support during my sentence.

Take care of yourselves.  
Love, Liberation  
and Solidarity.

Mel

7th April, 2002

*\* Mel Broughton is due for release on 21st June, 2002*

all they do is attempt to rubbish it. This is my home and I am proud. It's an easy life in here, not the same for everyone, I know, but if you ever come to Lewes prison you'll see what I mean, T.V's and kettles in the cells, a well catered for vegan diet and terrific support from the other guys on the wing - ahh, it's a hard life!

Anyway, this is just to let you know that I'm o.k here and things are fine. I hope all is well with you, the censor removes all my magazines so I don't get much, but people keep me updated in their letters of current happenings so I get to hear a few of the bigger things.

Take care and my full respect to you.  
Love,

Neil

April 2002.



# Prisoner News and Letters

## Rae Newlands

(now SCHILLING)



(written at HMP Holloway on 1st April 2002)

Just to let you know that I advised them [the prison authority] I would accept lunch yesterday and am off my food refusal which has lasted six days; but of course 'lo and behold' my lunch didn't appear and it was quite a day with a brilliant officer running around all the afternoon trying to put things right re: my weekly vegan pack. The day ended with a message from the kitchen 'to make up her bourbon allowance with custard creams' which aren't of course vegan! However, I was later informed that apparently my lunch did come up but wasn't marked vegan.

I bumped into one of the governors at lunchtime yesterday. She couldn't believe I was still having problems in receiving my vegan diet and that I had been on food refusal again. She didn't know anything about it and seemed very concerned that I still hadn't had a visit from the new residential governor. The main reason for my last food refusal was that on the previous Sunday afternoon a Senior Officer ordered me not to quote Prison Service Guidelines to the other officers.

Nowhere else to go for help - once again VPSG, back in your court?

*Rae*

Rae has since moved to HMP Winchester.

## Tom Harris

Tom was remanded in March for 12 days at HMP Chelmsford.

Hi, I'd like to start by thanking everybody who showed me solidarity and gave me strength during my stay at HMP Chelmsford. For those who are unaware of the ridiculous string of

## Natasha Dallemagne

This piece was written just before Natasha was tagged and released on 22nd April, 2002.

Dear VPSG

Still enjoying the free holiday at Highpoint with gym, yoga, wholesome vegan food, power showers, well-stocked library, ample leisure time, entertaining company and art classes provided at no extra cost!

Heather went home on Tuesday on tagging. It's hard to believe now that we spent 4½ months cooped up together in this tiny room - time really has flown by and we've had such a good time, and so many laughs.

Since Heather left six days ago, I've had two roommates in quick succession. To say they have been quite a change from Heather would be the understatement of the year! The first one was definitely off-key, but nothing compared to candidate No.2 who won the Mrs. O'Whacko of the year award hands down. She seemed quite normal at first (relatively speaking - don't forget I've been here some months now and it alters one's perception on such matters, believe me).

However, it soon became apparent that she had an abnormal interest in aliens, and she then revealed that she couldn't read the newspapers for too long as the words made her 'feel weird'. She also had a rather disconcerting habit of staring at me, a bit off-putting when you're trying to write a letter, or go to sleep! The best bit though was when

events that led to my brief sojourn inside, here's the facts:

On March 7<sup>th</sup>, several protestors, including myself, wandered into the Marsh Building in London. I ended up on the top floor of the high-rise office complex and wandered into an office, barricaded the door and began flicking through files.

After threatening to kick the s..t out of me, the security called the police, who arrested me for attempted burglary. The reason given was that they believed that I had pho-

she told me, straight faced and deadly serious, that no-one had ever landed on the moon and that all the news footage had been staged in the Nevada Desert - fantastic. I am enjoying an evening in on my own whilst eagerly awaiting the arrival of candidate No.3.

On a more serious note, between us, VPSG and the head of kitchens and canteen here, we have made a lot of progress as regards the treatment of vegans at Highpoint. We have been fortunate that Stuart Head (the Principal Officer of the Catering Department) has been open to discussion and, more to the point, has actually put what we have discussed into practice.



There is now a comprehensive vegan canteen list and we've been told by canteen staff that they have been surprised by how much demand there has been for all the vegan products, so a definite result there. It has also become a standing joke on our unit, how many people we have converted - the number of vegans rises steadily!

Thanks to wonderful VPSG who looked after us brilliantly and worked closely and at length with Highpoint to ensure we've had everything we've needed and always been at the end of the phone to sort things out for us.

Thanks also to everyone for the amazing support - it makes all the difference in the world.

Love and respect,

*Natasha*

1st April, 2002

tographed 'sensitive' documents. They later decided that this wasn't actually illegal, and so they accused me of stealing a spoon [!], and they also threw in a charge of section 4 of the vagrancy act, being in enclosed premises with unlawful intent. After nearly twelve days on remand they realised that section 4 doesn't apply to office blocks and that the spoon was in fact mine, and so they dropped the case and let me out.

Office occupations are not against the law, the police probably won't be mak-



ing the same mistake for a while so don't let this farce put you off!

The support from the VPSG, ALFG, SHAC and countless individuals was brilliant and really kept me going - it's an inspiration to see how the movement pulls together to support those in trouble. Thanks.

Sorry to those who received no reply to letters. Since my release I have been busy but intend to reply to everyone who wrote to me.

I was fortunate in that mine was only a flying visit to prison, but I will try to pass on any knowledge I gained in the hope that it helps people out in the

future. I spent most of my days watching t.v and reading/replying to letters, but I would recommend going out on exercise or association as much as possible, this will make you fit and hopefully make some friends. The same applies to the gym and showering (soap-in-the-shower scenarios are a myth of American T.V!)

The better you behave, the better the conditions of captivity, so it's best to keep your nose clean. If you don't receive vegan toiletries or food, keep asking until you do. If you don't receive vegan food to begin with [this is most likely at the police station or at court] be patient, they have to feed you eventually. I had to go two days with-

out food, but it was eventually sorted.

The best advice is to try to blend in and if in doubt copy someone else or ask a guard. Never forget you have a toilet, you can wash, you are unlikely to suffer physical harm, you will be released. The animals we fight for have none of this.

Love and Liberation, **Tom xxx**

April, 2002

*VPSG Note: We were unaware that Tom was not offered vegan food for two days until we received this letter. We have written to the prison asking for an explanation as they were contacted and faxed as usual.*

## Re-joining the SHAC campaign

by Heather Avery

By the time you read this I should have been released on the Home Detention Curfew scheme [tagging].

### New VPSG volunteer

*Letter from Mary Brough*

Hello everyone.VPSG has asked me to introduce myself formally, so here I am - Mary Brough. I'm a new volunteer, and I am putting together a database of upcoming animal rights trials. The idea is to provide the AR community with a tool that will help us support each other better.

Help us to help you! Everybody who has a court date coming up, let VPSG know - we'll put it on the website. This should, amongst other things, make it easier for people to get in touch with witnesses. We all know how difficult it can be to build a defence if our only witness is some nameless activist from the far end of the country!

The website should make it easier for such people to come forward and contact people on trial, so every one - potential witnesses, as well as people on trial - check it out!

That's it for now. Keep those details coming - and if you see me leafleting for VPSG at future demos, at least now you know who I am.

**Mary**

I will have been in prison here at High Point for just 132 days! I have treated this sentence as a holiday. I did everything I said I was going to do when I arrived here in November and I feel mentally and physically stronger than I have ever done in my whole life.

The support for our so called 'crime' has been overwhelming in here from prisoners and prison officers alike.

Every time another prisoner has asked what I'm in here for I've had comments such as "good on you", "well done", "you shouldn't be in here", "they deserve everything they get" and "I'm going to come on demos when I get out". A prison officer came into our cell one day, shut the door behind him and said "I think that what you're doing is brilliant". Other prison officers have said "don't get caught next time", "I hope you do close them down" and "they're the ones who should be locked up".

Highpoint does seem to be a lot better than many other prisons, I know this from reading about Mel and Rae's experiences in particular. The staff in the kitchen have made a big effort to make our meals varied and



tasty. We have received regular and plentiful supplies of marmite, calcium fortified soya milk and fruit. We have had our own vegan canteen list which included vegan toiletries, organic muesli, chocolate and most importantly Provamel Soya Desserts!

Thanks so much to VPSG who have worked so hard with Highpoint on our behalf. Please continue to support VPSG. They really do make a difference to time in prison.

Thank you to everyone who wrote to me. All your letters were the highlight of my day.

Don't ever underestimate how important your support is to prisoners. I will never forget the look of amazement on people's faces as Natasha and I carried huge piles of mail back to our cells.

During our time in prison the SHAC Campaign had gone from strength to strength. The spirit of SHAC is unstoppable. That strength and spirit will continue long after H.L.S. is closed.

Millions of animals are crying out for justice.

Love and Liberation, **Heather**



## Coping Inside Prison

(continued from page 1)

Most toiletries in prison are not vegan (again you should have a sheet with this detailing what is and what isn't). Also most, if not all, of those sold in the canteen are not vegan; if you don't recognise it as vegan then don't accept it.

### *So you need to get your own toiletries?*

There are several ways of doing this. Firstly, as already mentioned, you should receive a reception pack through the VPSG and then in future set up to buy your own from Honesty via the prison canteen. You can either pay for this through your own money (private cash) or get the prison to pay but this can be a bit like pulling teeth so you may well decide that you just want the toiletries with no hassle and so are prepared to pay for them yourself. One thing that is not acceptable is that you have to go without personal hygiene products for 10 days, 2-3 whilst they wait for the VPSG reception pack maybe, but do not be fobbed off with a delay that causes you problems. Why should you lose out.

Most things in prison are done on an application basis and in some prisons this can include phone calls. Asking early is the key - then check up that your request is being attended to.

You will frequently be told that such and such a request isn't possible, in some cases this may be true but in many others it isn't, and saying it isn't possible is a convenient way for them to say "I can't be bothered". Remember - do not be fobbed off. If in doubt, ask, and if you're still not sure then ask another officer.

Always be very dubious about anything other prisoners tell you, as in my experience most of them are lying. I have

always had the attitude 'Never a lender or borrower be'. By now you will have realised that a lot of people in prison exist by scrounging. You will be doing yourself a big favour in the long run if you say politely 'no' or 'I haven't got any'. If you say 'yes' then you can bet that they will be back time and time again. After you've said 'no' a few times they will get the message.

There are more drugs in the prison system than there are outside. I don't take drugs and if I did I wouldn't take them in prison. I'm not trying to be Oprah Winfrey or anything but 90% of violence in prison involves drugs or lending of some kind, as people don't pay back or not enough, etc so stay clear of trouble and don't get involved.

### *Coping Techniques*

Filling time and coping techniques are very subjective and you must use what works for you. Some people prefer to sit in their cell writing whilst others are out of their cell associating at every opportunity; do whatever suits you. I personally prefer to spend my time reading and getting fit by going to the gym and doing exercises in my cell, I am friendly and will associate but up to a point, as listening to people brag about their past crimes pales after a few seconds. If your only way of getting books is through the prison library you will find that you are rarely taken to the library. This is because many prison officers see the library as a bit of a nuisance to their routine. Again be persistent.

You may be sat there thinking that this prison lark is a piece of cake, free gym and they even cook your food for you! Or you may be sat there thinking your

whole world has collapsed; either way believe me, you will come through this and hey, if an idiot like me can come through the prison system several times without problems then you will be fine. Really use whatever works for you but

***"You may be sat there thinking this prison lark is a piece of cake: free gym, and they even cook your food for you..."***

always fill your time, cos if you don't, time will work against you. Personally I always think to myself about all the prisoners in other countries who are being killed and tortured; I think about the animals dying inside labs and slaughterhouses,

then think to myself "Come on, your lot's not too bad".

Work or education, that is the question. Again this is one for personal preference and in many prisons you may not have the choice. If you decide to work then don't forget that the prison safety boots are definitely not vegan but you can have your own non-leather ones sent in. There are quite a few jobs that are also a no-no: for example, being the wing cleaner, as you will have to carry the trays with meat on, and use animal-tested cleaning products.

To recap, never listen to anyone who tells you in prison that you have to accept something that is not vegan as this is not the case. If I had a pound for every time I was told "That's definitely vegan" when you know it's not or "We don't allow that here" when in fact they do, or could do!

As I write this they have just flown by helicopter to Barlinnie prison the man convicted of the Lockerbie bombing. Now if they can do that then processing your cruelty-free toiletries should be no problem. Do not be the one to lose out.

*Greg*

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## Prisoner updates

### *Miscellaneous news*

**Mel Broughton** will be released in June and he is planning to help the VPSG in an advisory capacity, and where else he feels he can assist.

**Rae Newlands** (who is now using the name of Schilling) was transferred to HMP Winchester shortly after being sentenced to 4 1/2 years. She is

having some initial problems with her vegan diet there, which we are trying to assist with. At the time of this newsletter going to print we haven't received any reply from our two communications so will update you in our next newsletter.

**Neil Bartlett** was transferred to HMP The Verne shortly after receiving a sentence of 4 years. Neil is reasonably happy with the vegan diet he is recei-

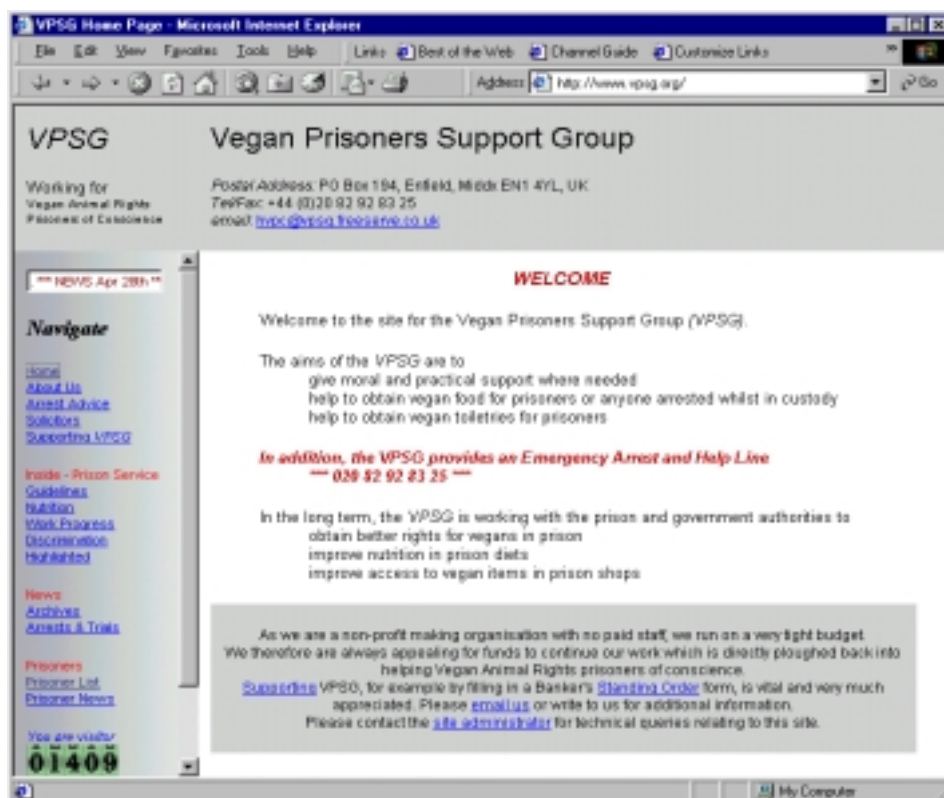
ving, but has requested our assistance with certain vegan items he would like to purchase from the inmates' shop.

**Dave Blenkinsop** has not managed to write for this newsletter as he is concentrating on paperwork connected with another trial he has pending.

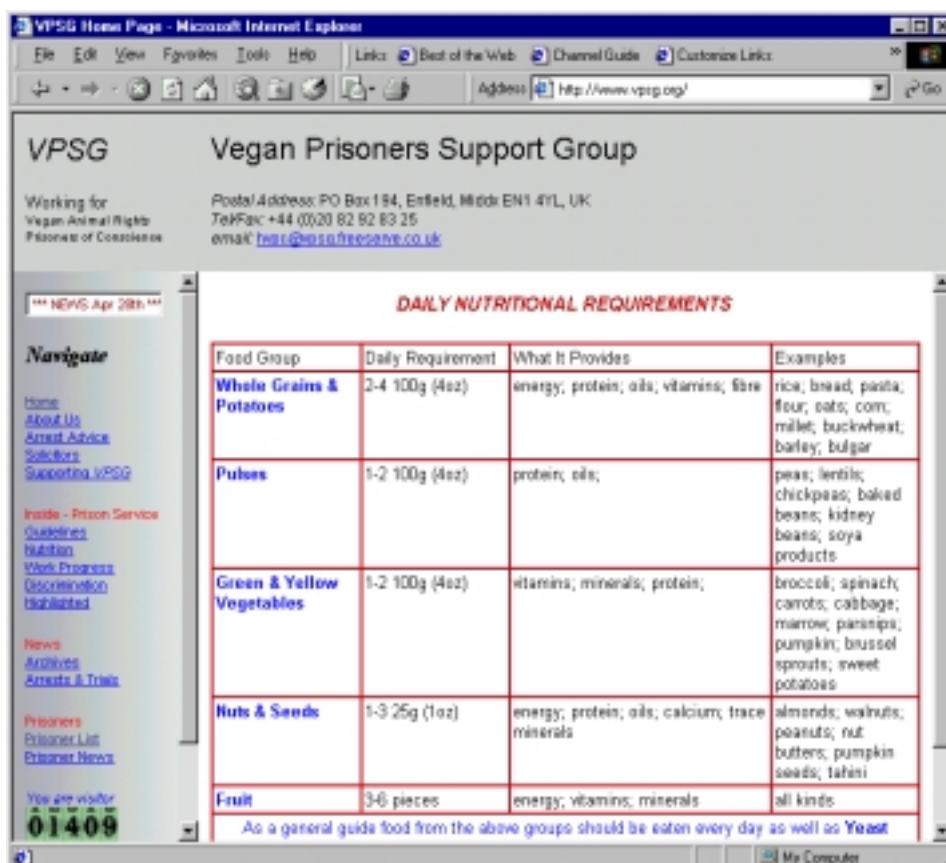
Heather Avery, Natasha Dallemagne and Greg Avery were released and are now free people again.

# VPSG Web Site Launched February 2002

VPSG has been busy compiling information on prisoners and guidelines for the prison authority onto the World Wide Web. Our site has already reached over 1500 hits in almost 4 months!



We hope that it is providing consistently up-to-date information about prisoners, and that it gives supporters an insight into the work carried out by VPSG when dealing with the Prison Service. We now have our own domain name - **www.vpsg.org** - so please take a look and feel free to share your comments with us. We are currently working on a tremendous amount of research and information which will be uploaded in due course. Above is the first page you'll come to, and below is one of the pages available to the prison service depicting the nutritional requirements for vegan prisoners.





# VPSG recommendations submitted to the prison service on the care of vegans

The problems of Rae Schilling and Mel Broughton attracted Ministerial attention when a supporter wrote to her MP after reading the previous newsletter.

The VPSG committee then decided that, having dealt with 195 cases individual prisoners over the past few years, the present guidelines needed updating. Consequently, we compiled more explicit recommendations which were then presented to the Prison Service for their consideration.

We feel that many problems are often due to a lack of understanding by prisons of the strict lifestyle that ethical vegans follow, and we are optimistic that once the wording of the recommendations are finally agreed there will be considerable improvement in how vegans are cared for by prison establishments.

One of our case workers attended a meeting at HMP The Mount in April, in an endeavour to try to sort out the problems Mel Broughton was having with his vegan diet.

We were advised that animal protein 'meat' was found in two of his meals and that his vegan option had on another occasion been contaminated as it had been fried in the same oil as non-vegan food.

After a shaky start, the meeting turned out to be quite successful and Mel is now the vegan food co-ordinator and, on application, can have a visit to the kitchen to discuss any problems. The Mount have withdrawn the vegan pack, but are supposed to include the items which were supplied in it into the daily menu choices.

The initial reception at HMP The Mount was strained, but since the meeting the kitchen staff are receptive to our input.

## Thank you

☛ THANKS to Neil (ARCnews) and Chris for sorting out the computer problems we have been experiencing recently; and to Kate and Jean A for the transportation to and fro;

☛ Thanks to Alan N, Kirsty and John for putting this newsletter together and for mailing it out;

☛ Thanks also to our Food Advisor, who is always at the end of the phone with any nutritional advice we need;

☛ Thanks to Kathy for all her help in the office;

☛ Thanks to our Food Advisor and to Mary, who is now co-ordinating our trial updates, and whom you may have seen at demonstrations advertising our work; thanks also to John and Kirsty, who have always raised the shortfall of money needed to keep the office in action;

☛ Thanks to all those who contributed to the stall we held at the Barry Horne Memorial Festival. The stall was well visited and many new people requested information about our work;

☛ In the eight years that it has been in existence, the VPSG has dealt with over 195 people detained within the prison system, and has helped hundreds of people arrested at demonstrations and held overnight at police stations. We are planning to expand our website ([www.vpsg.org](http://www.vpsg.org)) in the next few weeks to include pages for police stations and prisons to access for up-to-date information on how to care for vegans under their care. Thanks Alan N for setting up the website and for keeping it regularly updated as and when information is received on a new prisoner or any prisoner move. In the four months that the website has been in existence we have had over 1,500 visitors without even advertising our site.

☛ Thank you to all those who support our work financially on a regular basis. This helps us to budget our limited funds. All work is done by volunteers and no salaries are paid, so every penny goes towards helping vegan AR prisoners once those gates close behind them. If you can help, please turn to page 8.

## VEGAN FESTIVAL

We will be having a stall at the next Vegan Festival so do come and visit us!

The Festival will be held on  
**Sunday 29th September 2002**

at:

**Conway Hall, Red Lion Square  
London WC1**

(nearest Tube: Holborn)

10am-5pm

Admission:: Adults £1 / under 16 free

## Can you help VPSG?

As always, we are short of volunteers, and are looking for the following:

- ☛ Volunteer(s) to handle emergency arrests.
- ☛ Volunteer to conduct general research/update current research on food items purchased in for vegan prisoners.
- ☛ Volunteer(s) to train/help with Case Work on individual prisoners - this is crucial as any possible increase in prisoners would make it impossible for our one Case Worker to handle all prisoner issues.
- ☛ Buddies to take on one prisoner, keeping the office informed of any problems.
- ☛ Volunteer(s) to help raise funds for running costs related to the above.

All volunteers would need to be computer literate, have their own computer, fax and telephone, and have access to the internet. Unfortunately our limited funds do not stretch to providing these ourselves.

We are also looking for the following items - so if you can donate one/both or know someone who might, please get in touch!

- ☛ Fax machine
- ☛ Working computer (Win 98 or above if possible)

## VPSG Info Pack

**We are working on an information package to be provided upon request for any vegan with a court case pending who feels they might find themselves within the prison system.**

**This should hopefully be ready by the middle or end of June. When it's ready, we will also be loading it on our website.**

*Thank you!*

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### VEGAN PRISONERS SUPPORT GROUP STANDING ORDER FORM

Please note: once completed, please return to VPSG (not your bank) for processing

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

Your Address \_\_\_\_\_

#### To The Manager

Name of Bank \_\_\_\_\_

Branch \_\_\_\_\_

Bank's Address \_\_\_\_\_

Bank Sort Code \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_ Your Account Number \_\_\_\_\_

Please pay on  /  / 2002 and on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of every month, until further notice,

the sum of £  for the credit of the VEGAN PRISONERS SUPPORT GROUP

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Please note: Anyone wishing to leave a legacy towards our work, please contact the office for details.*

As we are a non-profit making organisation with no paid staff, we run on a very tight budget.

Supporting the VPSG is important to enable continued support for Animal Rights Prisoners who have risked their freedom for the benefit of their non-human relatives.

All donations are directly ploughed back into helping Vegan Animal Rights Prisoners of conscience.

A monthly donation of £1.00 (roughly 25 pence a week) will help ensure that we stay in existence. Your support in this way is most vital and gratefully received.



# Vegan Prisoners Support Group

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## Newsletter - January 2003

### PRISONER NEWS

**Dave Blenkinsop** received an additional sentence on the 11th December of 5 ½ years, in connection with handling incendiary devices. This is in addition to his previous sentence, now making a total of 10 years.

**Tony Humphries** was released on parole in July 2002 after serving over three and a half years of his sentence.

**Mel Broughton** was released on licence in June 2002, after serving 2 years and 8 months of his sentence.

**Rae Schilling's** sentence was reduced from 4 ½ years to 3 ½ years at the Royal Courts of Justice on the 20th December.

### E-MAIL UPDATE LIST

If you would like to be updated with new prisoners, moves, etc, then send an email to [vpsl2002@yahoo.com](mailto:vpsl2002@yahoo.com) with 'subscribe' in the subject line.

### TRIAL NEWS

#### BURSTOW TRIAL

The first 5 people on trial were Joan Blanch, Kate Fowler, Randolph Macfarlan, Shaun Reeves and Micheal Seal, all found guilty of conspiracy to commit violent disorder. All received community service sentences. The second group of five were all found not guilty.

#### FOLKESTONE FIVE

Gavin Medd-Hall, Kevin & Rylma White and Paul Baker, all released on bail, have all now had their charges dropped. They may receive lesser charges at a later date. Bob Lewis was also bailed, however his charges were not dropped.

#### JANUARY TRIAL

Beverley Garside, Sonia Hayward, Gavin Medd-Hall and are on trial on the 27th January 2003 at Maidstone Crown Court charges relating to campaigning against the Old Surrey and Burstow Hunt and Huntingdon Life Sciences.

### NEW RESEARCH FOR VEGANS IN POLICE CUSTODY

I'M THRILLED to be able to put something back into VPSG, having witnessed at first hand how much goes into helping vegan animal rights prisoners whilst detained within the Prison Service. However, I became aware that due to the lack of volunteers the problems at police stations had not been fully addressed and so I offered my help.

At the moment I am contacting every constabulary in the country to establish what guidelines they have in place regarding vegans held in custody in order to compile an overall picture.

As anyone who has been held at a police station will know, it is essential to be given assurances that they are being with provided with vegan food and toiletries. At the moment work is carried out as the situation arises and I feel it is important that police stations, like prisons, have strict guidelines regarding the care of vegans. I will be displaying my progress on the new website [www.vpsg.info](http://www.vpsg.info) in January.

Sarah Whitehead

# EDITORIAL

A lot has happened since our last newsletter and those of you who are unable to keep in touch by our website [www.vpsg.org](http://www.vpsg.org) may not know there has been considerable activity involving a number of people both in and out of prison these last months, which has meant we have been kept very busy here in the office.

For those of you who have access but haven't logged on yet, our website is a good way of keeping up to date with prisoner news and any change of location of any prisoner. We now also have our Basic Information for Vegan Prisoners in place on the website; this information should be useful for anyone with a court date and/or possibly facing a prison sentence. As several ex-prisoners were consulted, it should contain all the necessary information required to help any vegans finding themselves in prison.

We are at the moment planning a new website [www.vpsg.info](http://www.vpsg.info) which should be up and running in January; a direct link will be available from our present website for those supporters interested in being kept informed on how our work is progressing.

This website will be dedicated entirely to our campaigning efforts on the care of vegans either held in police custody or detained within the prison system. It will contain information on nutrition and our new Catering Information Pack which we are sending to all prisons over the next months, as funds allow. The compilation of this pack has taken considerable time and effort and without the invaluable help of Yvonne Barr BSc.Hons. Dip N, Stephen Walsh, Chair of The Vegan Society and their Spokesperson on Diet and Health, and Liz Cook (author of 'So What Do You Eat') it would have been impossible. It will also show the progress we are

making within the Prison Service on our ongoing concerns, that vegans continue to be disadvantaged whilst detained within the prison system. It will contain individual reports from ex-prisoners on the prisons where they were detained and will detail their own personal experiences and comments on different prison establishments. The new website will be made known to prisons and police stations and we hope that they will take advantage of the information installed.

Details of Sarah's research regarding vegans held in police custody will be another section. The research she has undertaken involves considerable work and requires her contacting every Police Constabulary in the country requesting information on what provisions they have in place for vegans. Once received, she has to compile all this information into a report so that we can see how this care can be improved. At the moment we work on each individual police station when anyone is arrested in order to arrange for toiletries/food.

Sarah has single-handedly taken on quite a mammoth task, and a job that VPSG have been anxious to start for a long time, but has been unable to do due to being kept busy with the amount of prison work. Therefore no-one has been available to undertake the amount of work involved until Sarah came on board. VPSG is confident that she will do an excellent job.

Our new case workers, Mary, Pauline and Greta are gradually finding their way through the different departments in order to deal with the many different problems prisoners experience, and a training pack containing the experiences gained in the office these last eight years is at the moment being compiled for their reference. Judy, another new volunteer, is planning to help out with the varied general office duties in the New Year. Both Mel Broughton and Tony Humphries, since their release,

have been helping on the VPSG Advisory Committee, which is very useful when needing their expert advice.

Since we were established we have dealt with hundreds of prisoners and a large proportion of the prisons several times. All this information is easily accessed due to the effective filing system compiled a while ago by Dru Benson and you can imagine this tedious task took her many hours of painstaking work. This filing system has proved to be well worth her efforts and been a great asset during these busy months.

## THANKS

As usual thanks to John and Kirsty for helping behind the scenes and for producing this newsletter; and to both Nigel and Ann, as well as Sonia, Clare and Kate for their help in the office; also a special thanks to Yvonne who supported me when I thought the Catering Information Pack would never come together; and to all those supporters who have made our work possible by their donations and standing orders. Contributing to our work in this way helps us to budget our funds which is more important than ever now our work and voluntary help is expanding. As supporters know all work is done by volunteers, but funds still need to be available for the other expenses such as fax/answering machines, stationery, telephone bills, etc., all necessary in running an efficient office in our campaigning for the care of vegan prisoners of conscience within the Prison System and detained in police custody. Last but not least, thanks to Alan and Paul who keep our website up to date and will be working on the new site shortly, and Johnny W, who helped with the newsletter. Without the help of all of you the support we give to vegan prisoners of conscience would be impossible.

Jo-Ann



# LETTERS

## **Tony Humphries**

*Released on parole in July*

A lot has happened since I last wrote for the VPSG newsletter, including the fact that I was finally released on parole on the 11<sup>th</sup> July 2002. When I look back over the last few years, I always feel a bit guilty, since I received so much support from individuals and organisations such as the VPSG, and it is always difficult to thank people enough. I know that the work the VPSG did for me had a tremendous impact on the quality of life that I was able to lead while in prison, and at each establishment I ended up in we were always able to achieve results that led to an adequate vegan lifestyle being possible.

I have now returned to my family, and we are getting used to a normal life again. Caroline and the children visited me every week for three and a half years, no matter where I was sent, which in itself has been a tribute to our resolve, as a movement, to cope with prison life when it comes along.

Some things have changed. For those of you who remember that I did not think I would ever see my old dog Pip again, well I did, since she lasted the whole sentence and was in good spirits on my release. However, she passed away on the 8<sup>th</sup> October, quite peacefully. I will also miss a good friend in Barry, who died on hunger strike a year ago. I will, next week, be putting Pip's ashes with Barry, symbolic maybe, but the two of them did get on well, both possessing a similar determination.

I will now remain on parole until 2004, but hope to spend some of my time working within the prison system to help with the problems that vegans, as a minority group, have to cope with and draw on my experiences gained since 1998. In the meantime, myself and my family would like to thank everyone who has supported us and the VPSG and made life bearable over the last few years.

Tony Humphries

## **Mel Broughton**

*Released on licence in June*

Well it's been five months since my release from prison and to be honest the transition to 'normal life' took about 24 hours. I have been re-united with my two dogs Ross and Chad who have settled down as if I'd never been away. The strict fitness regime I established in

prison has given way to a more relaxed approach to exercise. The nearest I've got to circuit training since leaving prison is chasing one of my dogs round the park because she pretends to be deaf when it's time to go home.

I have where possible been helping with the work of the VPSG and this has given me even greater insight into the vital work undertaken on behalf of AR prisoners in trying to secure a vegan

diet. It may be difficult for most people to appreciate that, whilst on the outside your right to follow an ethical diet is unquestioned, in the prison environment ignorance and sometimes blind prejudice can still create problems. During my time at HMP The Mount I experienced some problems with the vegan diet and found myself on numerous occasions invited to the kitchens to discuss veganism with an, at times, bewildered head chef. What I did find, was that even in this very controlled system there were ways to get your voice heard and influence positive change. The input from the VPSG gave my own efforts the much needed edge and between us we made massive progress in educating the prison kitchen on the needs of vegans. Another positive aspect of my time spent in prison was converting at least three other inmates to veganism.

I was at the Vegan Festival recently when someone tapped me on the shoulder and said 'Hi Mel'. It was an ex-prisoner who had been on my wing at The Mount and is now a strict ethical vegan.

The work undertaken by the VPSG on behalf of a/r prisoners is ongoing and as important as ever. The help given by ex-prisoners and dedicated volunteers will, I'm sure, raise the profile of vegans' needs within the prison system. I would finish by saying a personal big 'Thank You' to Jo-Ann for all the hard work she put in on my behalf.

Love & Liberation,

Mel

## **DISCLAIMER**

The views in the VPSG newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor. Responsibility cannot be taken for the accuracy of statements made by contributors or the verification of material sent to VPSG for inclusion in the Newsletter.

# LETTERS

**Rae Schilling**  
*HMP Winchester*

## **Welcome to the world of Winchester Prison, West Hill**

Most inmates would describe this prison as being akin to a hostel, or if there were such a thing, an adult boarding school. I tend to agree. West Hill can accommodate eighty seven prisoners at any one time and because it is a small community in comparison to most prisons, the regime is a relaxed one. This in itself came as quite a shock to me and took a certain amount of adjustment after the harshness of Holloway Prison, particularly the attitude of most of the screws there.

I have now learnt to adhere to the rules imposed, which has worked to my advantage. I am now trusted to move freely within the prison, which appears to attract staff of a fairly tolerant and amiable nature. West Hill is a working prison and work we must! I have the job of internal mail orderly here, which basically means that I fill in forms which are to be given out on various sheets of paper. Other forms of employment include the more physical tasks of cleaning, painting or working in the laundry, all of which of course I am exempt from as a strict ethical vegan. There is a well-equipped gym here. I don't personally use it, preferring to take my exercise in the prison garden which is maintained by three of the inmates and is always colourful and vibrant. It also attracts a wide variety of birds including the chaffinch, green finches, dunnocks and the gentle collared doves. I love them.

I am now living on the enhanced wing and have my own cell, which I retreat

to at times to read, write, listen to the radio or simply chill. I also have a TV and a newspaper provided and delivered! We have every weekend off and association most evenings, which is also an opportunity to use the telephone. There are, of course, certain conditions attached to these privileges and as with all prisons, if anyone decides to kick off there is the segregation unit (Punishment Block)!

My vegan diet is now understood and well catered for. There were initial problems which I anticipated there would be, after all prison as an establishment is notorious in its resistance to any widening of its criteria, whatever that might be. I am fortunate that my food is prepared by someone who

respects my beliefs and lifestyle and is herself a vegan, so we have an excellent relationship. I trust her implicitly. The prison allows me to order my toiletries via Honesty who have always been exceptionally helpful and get the products to me swiftly.

My major support, or as I refer to it 'my security blanket', comes in the form of the VPSG and ALFSG; A.R's supporters and friends, especially of course my partner.....my greatest delight being our weekly two hour visit, when my spirit is lifted once more and I am refocused.

... Until all are free.  
Stay strong!

Rae

**Neil Bartlett**  
*HMP The Verne*

Just to let you know I'm doing ok here at The Verne. I work as an inmate tutor helping to teach Basic English to a class of around 12 to 15. I also started an 'A' Level Psychology course which should be good.

The prison itself is fine and I'm now settled in my own single room with a nice view of a hill. On Friday evenings I go along to a meditation session in the Buddhist lounge which I really enjoy and look forward to throughout the week. It's very relaxing as you can imagine and the scent of the incense is a real treat in itself. Plus the room's carpeted!

On the legal front the police believe I'm behind a further 35 bomb hoaxes, though the CPS are apparently not interested in pursuing the matter. I will be recorded as the offender for their clear-up rates.

Other than that everything here is fine and I'm making the most of the gym and anything else I can get my hands on. I hope all is well with you out there.

In Love and Liberation,

Neil



# LETTERS

## Kate Simpson

*Written at HMP Morton Hall. Released on tagging 4th November 2002*

Dear VPSG Supporters,

The following is an account of three very different prisons visited in the last four months. In the current climate of rabid policing there is the potential for people to be remanded on stupid charges – albeit for a short period, and so I hope this goes some way towards demystifying the experience and showing that it really is not that bad.

### HMP Holloway

On arrival this is probably the most daunting women's prison in the south on account of the oppressive Victorian atmosphere. Many historic fighters have passed through this establishment on the road to victory. It was a second home to the suffragettes and the inside has changed so little in the last 100 years that it is easy to imagine. Once the initial fear of the unknown is overcome, however, you realise that it is not so bad. The screws seem to shout a lot, but you quickly learn it's just noise and they're fairly harmless. Being probably the largest women's prison there are a few special facilities, such as a swimming pool, which is surprisingly clean and pleasant, given the state of the rest of the place.

The weekly canteen is one of the best: you actually go there and choose what you want from behind a counter. They stock a number of vegan items, and a variety of fresh fruit. This prison is no stranger to veganism, and you receive a good sized vegan pack, which varies, but normally has plenty of bourbon biscuits, soya milk, raisins, peanuts,

marmite, peanut butter and occasionally a grapefruit and crisps. This is fortunate as the food is not always trustworthy and the menu, repeated every week, was exactly the same as the last time I was there almost two years ago.

The standard fare is a chick-pea curry, which comes under many exotic names



in some vain attempt to give an impression of variety. Thankfully it is quite tasty. The induction wing is grim: the cells are dirty, old and badly equipped, but you soon move off and are likely to get enhanced status and end up in the more salubrious cells which are quieter and with TV's.

It is easy to get moved to a single cell, and unless you are in with people you know it is definitely advisable. It is important to know your rights, both as a prisoner and as a vegan, and to make sure you demand them, as this place has a tendency to take the p\*\*s, but you will receive information from VPSG about this. After a few days you adjust to the surroundings, and realise it is nowhere near as bad as it first appears. Having said that, I was overjoyed when I heard I was moving on to Highpoint...

*NB It is worth noting that one of the benefits of arriving in Holloway is that you have some chance of choosing*

*which jail you are moved to if you put in an application quickly enough.*

### HMP Highpoint

This is about half the size of Holloway, but is expanding to help accommodate the ever-increasing number of women being incarcerated. The first thing that struck me after Holloway was the amount of space. There are six main housing blocks all surrounded by areas of grass and perimeter fences, and a more relaxed atmosphere because of this. Since I was there in the summer, many an idle moment was spent sunbathing. Amazingly I ended up in a cell right next to Sarah, which was lucky – it is definitely easier being with someone you know. The canteen and kitchens were already prepared for vegans, thanks to the work of the VPSG and previous inmates, which made it a lot easier for us. If you like veggie sausages and chips this is the place to go, as it seems to be the staple diet. Most importantly you could trust the food to be vegan, and this makes for a far less stressful stay. Generally this place is pretty relaxed. You are locked on a “spur” but you have a key to your room, and are free to move about on the landing any time of the day or night, which gives you at least some freedom. The other inmates tended to be very sympathetic towards us, which was typical of all the prisons in my experience, and a heartening number of them became vegetarian/vegan after talking to us (the prison food also worked in our favour).

One good thing you could say about the length of our sentence was that it meant we were entitled to an education. On

# LETTERS

offer was data input, painting and decorating, hairdressing, basic skills in adult education, and dossing around in the art block (my choice). The only thing I really didn't like was that single cells were hard to come by, and Sarah and I were separated after our inductions, meaning we only met up in the gym.

## HMP Morton Hall

Surrounded by many acres of old English woodland this is a semi-open prison taking only convicted prisoners, many of whom are doing long sentences, which makes for a more tranquil atmosphere. The security is pretty much the same as Highpoint, but the conditions are miles better. On my unit all the cells have TV's, fitted furniture, quilts and en-suite bathrooms, complete with showers – serious luxury! You are only locked up at 8.45pm, and the rest of the day is filled with work and/or education. I was the first vegan they'd had, and after initially thinking I was some kind of alien the kitchens started producing some incredible meals. I had my own personal chef who I was able to meet and trust, and I am happy to say that vegan mayonnaise is now available there. The upside to this ridiculous sentence was that I was able to go to the gym, take a course of auricular acupuncture and a shorter one in German, obtain loads of certificates in computing, and catch up on lots of television. Yeah, I know – it's a tough life!

Thank you to everyone who wrote to me – sorry if I did not get back to you but the volume of mail was enormous.

Thanks VPSG – keep up the good work!

Love and liberation

Take care, Kate



**Sarah Gisborne**  
*HMP Highpoint*

strength ready for my release. I've read books I would not have otherwise had time to read; also I am quite a good Scrabble and chess player now. Thanks to Her Majesty!

The food here has been quite good thanks to the VPSG (a SHAC activist in the US does not have such support and struggles with his vegan diet). I will come out mentally and physically stronger, ready to continue the fight.

One of the greatest pleasures here has been the starlings on my windowsill, arguing over the oats, etc. that I put out.

I've never been more sure of anything than this; that what we do and what we sacrifice are 100% worth it and we can never look back once we have the dreadful knowledge and truth of what we must stop! I remember as a child that I was fortunate enough to be brought up around fellow creatures. I would sit with my chickens in their coop at night and watch them all fall asleep – I felt at one with them. My mother always knew where to find me. Little did I know that millions of others were not given the same respect that my naughty dozen had. That changed in my teens; I became vegetarian at 17 after watching a programme on TV with Australian farmers putting stakes through live kangaroos to deter others from eating their crops. I instinctively knew the world was cruel and this certainly confirmed it. I could never walk past a dog or cat wandering the streets and would always try and kiss them much to my mother's fear. I guess I was reaching to where I am now from day one, and I know in my head that I will give my life to make a difference to their immeasurable suffering.

I'm immensely grateful for the inspirational people I have met in this battle and the inspiration they have given me. I went vegan the first day I decided to make this life change and dedicate my life to winning this WAR! I feel honoured and am grateful I finally woke up. I'm now 37 years old and hope to remain fit and well to continue to the best of my ability.

The best of health to everyone - they need all of us!  
Always for them!

Sarah

*Editor's Note: Sarah was initially released on tagging, but is now serving an additional one year at Highpoint.*

# LETTERS

## Kerry Whitburn

*Written whilst remanded at HMP Birmingham on charges relating to the Newchurch Guinea Pigs Campaign.*

Hi folks, hope you are all well. My name is Kerry (I'm a male – honest), I'm 35 years old and live in Birmingham. On Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> October I was arrested during an animal rights demonstration at Newchurch Guinea Pig Farm. This is a hell-hole belonging to the Hall family, where guinea pigs are bred in their thousands before being sold to the vivisection industry. I was subsequently charged under Section 4a of the Public Order Act – using threatening or insulting words or behaviour with the intention of causing alarm, harassment, distress or the fear of violence to an individual. In this instance the alleged victim is PC Mark Rushden, of Staffordshire Police! Not surprisingly, I was refused bail by the police on the grounds I am on bail for a similar offence (criminal damage to a HLS employee house, for which I have a trial at Peterborough magistrates Court over the 15<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> December. NOT GUILTY, of course!!!).

On Monday 28<sup>th</sup> October, I was remanded in custody by Burton Magistrates and sent to Winson Green Prison Birmingham. Bizarrely, this prison is only ten minutes from my home – though an escape attempt NEVER entered my mind! Jo-Ann and VPSG had arrived (by phone) at the prison even before I had! Quite lucky really, as it became obvious that most officers would need emergency vegan education if I was to spend a few weeks there. But as I'd spent time on remand

last year in Bedford, I knew not to be fobbed off with convenient ignorance. Besides, the polite threat of "Oh, if you're not sure boss, I can always call the VPSG" usually provoked the officers' sleeping memory cells!!!

I did, on arrival and after being processed, receive my vegan pack containing many luscious vegan goodies. However, the following day led me to believe I may have problems regarding food, as I was met with blank looks when I requested my vegan meal at lunch time. Needless to say, I was told by a forceful but surprisingly 'knowledgeable' chap that the huge tray of 'whatever' in front of him was vegan. I say surprisingly knowledgeable as it was quite obvious from his facial expression he hadn't a clue what a vegan was! Anyway, after a few minutes of searching for the elusive corn on the cob it was spotted – lurking around in the background, entering someone else's mouth!!! Not good, I considered. However, by the following day my meals were correct and in order – even being kept separate from all other foods. Oh, for small mercies!!!

The only issue I felt grieved about (apart from the fact I was locked up for 23 ½ hours a day) is the lack of non-leather prison shoes. Considering the footwear recommended by VPSG is so much cheaper than the usual prison leather shoes, Winson Green Prison do not seem to have registered this. Unfortunately, even on remand, prisoners are not allowed to wear their own clothes, even footwear. So I was given a pair of foam slippers! Hey, no expense spared, you know! Besides, I wouldn't have really wanted to wear the footwear I wore to court, and also on arrival at the prison. Unfortunately, I was arrested in a pair



of black wellies!!! On Friday 1<sup>st</sup> November I was granted conditional bail by Burton Magistrates Court. I am back in court on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> November, to enter a NOT GUILTY plea.

As I only spent 3 ½ days at Winson Green Prison, I can't claim to have a fully formed opinion. But it is apparent that without the help and support of VPSG, I would have encountered fundamental problems.

So for every VEGAN prisoner around the country, PLEASE support VPSG and their invaluable work. Who knows – one day it could be your friend, or a loved one, even you who needs the VPSG!!!

Kerry

*Editor's note: for details on the outcome of court appearances, see prisoners' list.*

## \* BIRTHDAYS \*

Rae Schilling  
15 January  
Jonny Abelwhite  
27 January  
Gillian Bradley  
13 May  
Sarah Gisborne  
5 July

Please note:  
Dave Blenkinsop does not  
celebrate his birthday.

# LETTERS

## **Madeline Buckler**

*Written from HMP  
Bullwood Hall, now  
released on tagging*

Before I came to prison I was quite nervous about what the food situation would be like especially with all the horror stories I'd heard from ex-prisoners! I've been vegetarian since I was 10 and went vegan when I was 14 under the influence of my sister.

I've always been a strict vegan and never ate the 'vegan' food in police stations, due to lack of trust. I am a healthy vegan, was on a sugar-free diet and love cooking – all of which has changed in the last three months.

My first aim when I arrived at Bullwood Hall was to have a meeting with some of the kitchen staff to establish a menu, which never happened. Countless promises were made and broken and at first I was only eating salad and reheat sausages.

With the help of the VPSG they started making me in-house meals. Eventually they sorted out soya milk, margarine, dried fruit, nuts and cereal (also thanks to the VPSG), which they issue each time when I run out. With the in-house meals I felt I had to double-check everything that was in the meal, especially because the majority of the kitchen staff are inmates and still don't seem to have a clue what I can and can't have. A few times there were slip-ups which made me lose my trust in their knowledge of veganism and even one supervisor seemed to think fish was vegan! I was also very shocked when they gave me lamb curry, but that was a genuine mistake and thankfully I didn't eat any. Now they give me ready-made curries every night – I'm never

going to want curry again when I get out! On a couple of occasions they've made me puddings, but they seem to have given up on that now. Also every now and then they seem to forget to order soya milk or margarine, etc. My reception pack of toiletries arrived quickly and I have since made my own orders.



I have learnt what a valuable organisation the VPSG is. As a new prisoner with little confidence in a prison, who do not appear to have much experience in providing vegan food, the VPSG have been essential. I'm on education every morning and have recently done a talk on vivisection as part of my course. I go to the gym as often as I can and have passed some certificates. This experience has definitely built my confidence in handling the vegan food situation in prisons, but it has also been great to have someone who can phone or fax the kitchens, or someone more senior, if they are not responding to me.

There is still a lot that needs changing in prisons for vegans and I would encourage everyone to donate or volunteer to help the VPSG at their office.

*Madeline*

## **Kevin White**

*Written while at HMP  
Canterbury*

It was no real shock for me to end up in prison. I'm just a little surprised that they went to such lengths to put us all here.

The whole case relates to normal peaceful demonstrations connected with the SHAC Campaign.

When we attended Maidstone Crown Court for the preliminary hearing, both my mother [Rylma White] and Robert Lewis made bail applications. Although both need to use walking sticks due to various health problems, every bail condition imaginable was put before the judge, including signing on at a police station every day and not to attend any demos or marches and even restricting their home phones to only receiving incoming calls. Despite a total of 9 conditions available to him, the judge took just 5 seconds to refuse bail on the grounds that they may commit further offences or abscond. It was quite clear that his decision was made before he even came into court!

This case proves beyond a doubt how totally desperate and worried Marsh, HLS and the authorities are.



We are just doing fine, enjoying a relaxing break. Our animals and families at home are all happy and being well looked after. Many thanks to everyone at VPSG for all your help and support. The vegan food we've been treated to has been fantastic. Two hot, delicious and nutritious meals everyday and plenty of extras like fruit, Marmite, peanut butter, etc.

Nobody should be scared about coming into prison as there is



# LETTERS

absolutely nothing to fear. For me this is like staying at Butlins, but for the animals Auschwitz is no holiday.

Keep fighting, keep winning.  
For the animals,

Kevin

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## LETTERS FROM THE FOLKESTONE FIVE

*(Arrested and remanded on charges relating to the campaign against Marsh UK)*

### Gavin Medd-Hall

*Written whilst remanded at  
HMP Canterbury*



Hi VPSG,

I would like to thank you for all the work you have done on my behalf, since my initial arrest and detention in police custody and also when I was formally remanded to HMP Canterbury.

Also special thanks to those people who kindly dropped off food, toiletries, etc. to the police station. I can honestly say nobody should fear prison, in fact, I think starting a new school is more daunting! Thanks to the efforts of the boys from the clueless squad in ensuring bail was initially refused, they have in effect used the states only tool of deterrent – and it has been shown as a sham. There is nothing to fear but fear itself. We will all be there at the end to see the destruction of HLS – and then onwards to the next campaign.

Finally, many thanks to all those who wrote, even if you did not all get a reply. I can assure you that all are read and gratefully appreciated.

Best wishes

GAVIN

### Paul Baker

*Written while at HMP  
Elmley*



First of all may I take the opportunity to thank everyone at the VPSG for their support and commitment and to everyone who sent letters and cards in support of the 'Folkestone Five'.

If you haven't had a reply from me yet it's probably because most of my mail has gone to Canterbury while I was being moved to Elmley. Hopefully it will be forwarded along with the toiletries sent to me by VPSG and my clothes (lost in the system).

If anyone is scared of going to prison, I can tell you the fear is much greater than

prison itself. I have a single cell to myself with colour TV, exercise every day and education. This prison has a healthcare centre which would put the NHS in the shade. A gym with about £1.5 million of equipment - no wonder there's so much crime! And the best of all, as an AR prisoner, great back-up from organisations like the VPSG. No one wants to go to prison but once you're here you wonder why you worried so much.

Soya milk doesn't arrive automatically with your breakfast and it does take a few days to sort things out. On the positive side there appears to be a vegan option on the menu, so that's a starting point. There are telephones on every wing so you can phone your loved ones, it works on a pin number system, but anyone going to prison beware if anyone finds out your pin number, your account soon goes to zero - as I found out to my cost! But no one is going to come into my cell, strap me down and pour chemicals down my throat, so compared to what the animals have to put up with at HLS ... it's like a holiday camp. At the time of writing, bail may still be an option or I may be here weeks or months to come, I'm sure the VPSG website [www.vpsg.org](http://www.vpsg.org) will be updated accordingly.

Finally my thoughts go out to all other AR prisoners and everyone fighting animal abuse in all its disgusting forms and let us not forget it was only 12 months ago we buried Barry Horne - his commitment to fighting the abusers has to be admired even if we don't agree with his tactics.

For the animals,  
Love and Liberation,

Paul

# LETTERS

## Bob Lewis

*Written whilst on remand  
at HMP Elmley*



Well, here I am in Elmley in Kent, a long way from my home in Wales; knowing I have the support of all my friends out there is keeping me in good spirits. The prison is just starting to sort out my vegan requirements thanks to the Vegan Prisoners Support Group; without them I doubt we would be properly provided for. At the moment I am in a cell of my own with a TV and have received lots of mail. I start evening classes on Monday the 21<sup>st</sup> and will make use of the gym next week to get in shape.

One thing I forgot to say is not to worry if they send you to prison; it only goes to show our strength. The day will come when all lab animals will not suffer anymore and will be free to roam and to live in peace and love. We are all there for them. We will never fail them.

My thanks to you all for your support.

Love and Liberation

Bob

\* \* \* \* \*

## PRISONER LIST - as of 1st January 2003

### Dave Blenkinsop [EM7899]

HMP Bullingdon

Patrick Haugh Road, Arncliffe, Bicester, Oxon OX6 0PZ

*Sentenced to 3 years for GBH on Brian Cass MD of HLS, 18 months for burglary in connection with the 'theft' of 600 guinea pigs from Newchurch Farm, and 5 ½ years in connection with handling incendiary devices.*

### Rae Schilling (nee Newlands) [GN6613]

HMP Winchester, Romsey Road, Winchester SO22 5DF

*Sentenced to 4½ years in connection with aggravated harassment to HLS Shareholders. Reduced on appeal to 3½ years.*

**Note: Neil Bartlett has requested that his name be removed from all listings.**

### Sarah Gisborne [HR4605]

HMP Highpoint, Stradishall, Newmarket, Suffolk CB8 9YG

*Sentenced one year in connection with criminal damage in connection with the SHAC Campaign.*

## Ode to Her Majesty's Prison Holloway

by Rae Schilling

It's Her Majesty's Prison... so why isn't she here?-

They've had Dames and Ladies and the wife of a peer.

Maybe she'll be along later - don't ask me to cheer -

I'm detained at Her Majesty's Pleasure.... I thought she'd appear.

I'm also quite disappointed she's not sent a card

Or let me swap places - I'd prefer her backyard.

Windsor, The Palace, Balmoral would do -

I could breathe the fresh air and take in the view.

Still, it's back to reality... the old Judge sent me down.

He passed a grave sentence... read with a frown.

"You are going to Her Majesty's Prison and think yourself lucky!"

When the press get hold of this, it's going to get mucky.

I'll start from day one... when I arrived at this place.

You should see the architecture - awfully bad taste.

I stepped from the sweat-box.... No cuffs on this time.

I blinked once or twice... then got in the line.

Then, resolute as always, I stood on the mat.

A quick rub-down - I tell you, I felt a bit flat.

I walk on inside with a screw at my rear.

No "hellos", "good evenings" - they're very serious in here.

I'm handed a form.. "Sign there... inmate... that's you."

I again tell myself, 'You've got to get through.'

Another screw enquires, "What is your name?"

I enunciate it clearly - they won't use it again

She tells me my number and says, "Go over there.

Walk round that table and sit on the chair.

Look this way." Snap!... and the photo is taken.

A "high-tech" machine - how fast can it make them?

I can't believe how quickly that picture came through -

It's stuck on my resume pack with a large blob of glue.

*(continued on the next page)*

### Gillian Bradley [HR4606]

HMP Highpoint, Stradishall, Newmarket, Suffolk CB8 9YG

*Received 9 months for criminal damage relating to AR campaigns.*

### Jonny Ablewhite [HP6290]

HMP Belmarsh, Western Way, Thamesmead, London SE28 0EB

*Received 9 months for criminal damage relating to AR campaigns.*

### Kerry Whitburn [JP4915]

HMP Bedford, St. Loyes, Bedford MK40 1HG

*Sentenced to 2 months on the 17<sup>th</sup> December 2002 charges relating to the SHAC Campaign. He is still waiting for a trial date in connection with the charges relating to the Newchurch Guinea Pig Campaign.*

**NOTE: Prisoners can receive postal orders, SAE's or books of stamps, writing paper and envelopes, see-through biros.**

Now, here comes the personal bit... they take all of my clothes -  
Even the ones I'm standing up in.."Come on, we'll have those."  
They label and count them... then shove them in bags -  
Now they have everything I own... yes, even my fags.  
Next it's "strip search" .... "But it's my body!" I shout.  
"Love, we've done this so often... your body means nought."  
Time to get dressed again... the search is done -  
I've an appointment with the doctor - that should be fun.

I enter the surgery and say, "How do you do."  
The nurse doesn't say much except, "Take a pew."  
I wondered, as I stood there, what I ought to do.  
"It's her blood pressure doctor... it seems a bit low."  
"Pump a bit harder nurse... to increase the flow."  
It will settle, I daresay, in one day or two,  
Otherwise we'll book her in for a thorough check through."  
"She's a funny colour doctor... a strange shade of green."  
"She looks a bit sickly... yes... it's clear to be seen."  
Remember when these women arrive, they're shocked and they're sad.  
But, you know nurse, they deserve it... they've been very bad."

I nod as I leave... now I feel like hell.  
I make the decision to press the emergency bell.  
Two screws come running... I feel quite reassured.  
But they shout, "Do that again and you'll just be ignored."  
Now drag your bags through with your property in...  
Leave them unattended and they go in the bin."  
I need to cool off... think straight... work out a plan.  
I need strategies here to last this long span.  
"So onwards and upwards." I say to myself.  
Worries and problems I'll stick on the shelf.

To another place now... it's supper time soon.  
The women are seated... there's a real air of gloom.  
Next an announcement: "Food's entering the room." -  
We're handed a plate, a mug and a spoon.  
In comes the meal... It's a joy to behold!  
Mixed vegetables, a baked potato - all freezing cold.

A couple of hours later and the screws reappear.  
"Thank goodness," I say, "It's an age I've sat here."  
They both glare at me - did I say something wrong?  
"Just sort yourself out you... if you intend to get on!"

We're allocated to wings... "You're on D1... you're C4...."  
We walk up the stairs and through a big door.  
Along many landings or blocks as they're known.  
More gates and doors... "How much further," we groan.  
Now it's my turn it seems... we've arrived at my cell -  
Bang goes my door and the hatch door as well.

I unpack my stuff and look at the view -  
There's a bed, a table and a dirty old loo.  
I feel awfully tired, but there's unpacking to do.  
I've got to keep busy to prevent feeling blue.

I dream of a cuppa, but no chance as yet.  
Instead I make up my bed - two blankets I get.  
Sleep seems to come easy... though the noise is absurd.  
I go right through the night... not a sound have I heard.

The next morning I say, "Is there breakfast for me?" -

I'm handed bread, two Weetabix and a nice cup of tea.  
We're going to be allowed out today - it's "Freeflow" for a while.  
We can go to the gym or get a book and read it in style.  
I plump for the library - someone's been to the gym before...  
She got thumped with a basketball... right on the jaw.  
The first book could be a revelation - it's "Crime Doesn't Pay".  
There's no need to push that one... I pop it away.  
The searching is done... I've found just the thing.  
"101 Things To Do...If And When You're Stuck In."  
A woman flicks on the video player -  
Concentration gone... it's T.V. for an hour.  
The first film's a short one - "Drugs And Their Misuse." -  
If you're not hooked yet, you might find it some use.  
The longer film is on - "Self-Harm" - I may give that a try.  
It could get me attention... just to help me get by.  
It seems you need little equipment to damage yourself -  
Shame... before I came in here, I was in perfect health.  
This morning, I hadn't given these issues a thought...  
But now my mind is racing... I wonder will I get caught?  
No matter... I'm allowed three books and return to my cell.  
Not only will I be occupied, but "well read" as well.

Lunch is a sandwich, an apple and crisps -  
Then some woman kicks off and shows me her fists.  
She wants an extra portion, but no one will offer.  
"Give me yours," she says meanly... "Not likely," I proffer.  
"If I share these, you see, I'll have nothing 'til supper." -  
Then three screws drag her off... I hope that she'll suffer.

It's afternoon... so out to the exercise yard -  
The women stand in groups... they look very hard.  
I keep my head down, as I pace out my walk.  
The language is awful... you should just hear them talk.  
I look to the sky... I feel quite close to tears.  
I think of the future... will I last out these years?  
A screw beckons and snaps out, "Don't think of escaping."  
You haven't a hope and the rules you'll be breaking."  
I look around me and muster a grin -  
What a bizarre situation to find myself in.

On to the block again... it's another bang up -  
I'll write a letter to someone... I won't get in a rut.  
I think it's supertime... a distant trolley I can hear.  
I'll write the letter later, when I'm sure my head's clear.

Again, there's no association - earlier two of the girls kicked off.  
If they carry on that way, their punishment's down the block.  
The chosen recipient of my letter, after thought, I reckon.  
Will be the head of prisons... Queen Elizabeth the second.

"I'm in your prison, Your Majesty... I hope you feel some shame...  
The state of it - this human pit - and over it you reign.  
I know it isn't your fault I'm here - I didn't use my brain.  
Next time you're in North London - along the Parkhurst Road.  
Look out for Holloway Prison... it's number 1x I'm told.  
You will be right by "your building"... a stone's throw away.  
And guess who will be throwing the stone from inside Holloway?

*Editor: The above is an abridged version of Rae's poem for which she won an award in an inter-prison competition - for the unedited version send an SAE to VPSG.*

# Vegan Prisoners Support Group

PO Box 194, Enfield, Middlesex EN1 4YL

Tel/Fax 020 8292 8325

E-mail: hvpc@vpsg.freemove.co.uk Web: www.vpsg.org

PLEASE NOTE: Once you have completed the following standing order form, please return to VPSG, not your bank

## STANDING ORDER FORM

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

Your Address \_\_\_\_\_

### To The Manager

Name of Bank \_\_\_\_\_

Branch \_\_\_\_\_

Bank's Address \_\_\_\_\_

Bank's Sort Code      -   -      Bank Account Number   

Please pay on the     /  /     and on the        day of every month until further notice,

The sum of £     for the credit of VEGAN PRISONERS SUPPORT GROUP.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please check our website for regular updates [www.vpsg.org](http://www.vpsg.org)

As we are a non-profitmaking organisation with no paid staff, we run on a very tight budget. Supporting the VPSG is important to enable continued support for animal rights prisoners who have risked their freedom for the benefit of their non-human relatives. All donations are directly ploughed back into helping vegan animal rights prisoners of conscience.

A monthly donation of £1.00 (roughly 25 pence a week) will help ensure that we stay in existence. Your support in this way is most vital and gratefully received.



# Vegan Prisoners Support Group

Newsletter, May 2003

## Greetings from the 'Bar View' Hotel

By Sonia Hayward at HMP Cookham Wood

Thank you all so much for writing, every day feels like my birthday with so many cards. I am having to write a standard letter due to an avalanche of mail, just to save me writing the same thing, and also to ensure you get a quick reply.

I am in very good spirits, REALLY. It's not that bad. In Holloway I had a single cell with a TV, and, much to my surprise, I exerted myself at the gym, twice, my little legs didn't know what was happening when I went on the walking machine.

I moved to Cookham Wood on Monday last week. I have to share a cell here, but my cell mate is OK. On the first day she asked me what a vegan was, I told her, she just said 'OK'. Then a huge supply of nuts, dried fruit, soya milk, marmite, etc arrived. The next day my cell-mate asked when she could get her vegan pack – I explained she has to be vegan – and then the prison supply it. So she has said she wants to be vegan. I am unsure of her motives, a genuine concern for animals or the extra goodies. I have got about six months to guide her.

In fact the VPSG have done such a good job in sorting out my food it would be rude to go on a diet.

The catering manager is the same one who deals with HMP Rochester, over the road. I arrive in Tony Humphries wake as I've been told I can have anything I want within reason.



I haven't got a job yet (no change there) but I expect I'll be doing something soon.

I really miss all my friends on the out. I try to save a few credits on my phone card to call someone every day. I miss my cats too. I've got two pet spiders in my cell, Hairy Harry & Furry Fred. I had to rescue them from someone else's cell, or they would have been killed.

The worse thing about this place is the cell. It looks like it has been painted by a drugged up inmate who didn't use any masking tape, or bothered to cut in. The curtains are horrid too and the bed is the most uncomfortable ever. But then I look at my SHAC poster for a reality check, the animals at HLS have no bed at all.

continued on pg 10

### In this issue:

- Letters from prisoners
- Recent news on arrests and trials
- Ex-prisoners talk about their experience of prison.
- Supporters letters.

## Prisoner News

### Sonia Hayward

On 20 March Sonia Hayward was sentenced to 15 months imprisonment for conspiracy to damage property and also 2 months for conspiracy to harass, to run concurrently.

The first charge related to companies linked to HLS, and the second to the Old Surrey and Burstow hunt.

Read Sonia's letter, see left.

Write to Sonia:

Sonia Hayward (KV5943),  
HMP Cookham Wood, Rochester,  
Kent ME1 3LU.

### Article on Dave Blenkinsop

See page 2. Written by a campaigner who followed the events leading up to Dave's current sentence.

Write to Dave:

Dave Blenkinsop (EM7899),  
HMP Bullingdon,  
Patrick Haugh Road,  
Aincott,  
Bicester,  
Oxfordshire OX6 0PZ.

## Contact VPSG

### Postal Address:

PO Box 194, Enfield, Middx EN1 4YL,  
United Kingdom.

### Emergency Arrest Line:

07743 536 114 (we will call you back)

Office/fax: +44 (0)20 82 92 83 25

E-mail: [info@vpsg.org](mailto:info@vpsg.org)

Web: [www.vpsg.org](http://www.vpsg.org)

Disclaimer: The views in the VPSG newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor. Responsibility can not be taken for the accuracy of statements made by contributors or the verification of material sent to VPSG for inclusion in the Newsletter.

## Editorial

**New supporters are often asking how VPSG started so thought I would write just a few words on the subject.**

### Some history

It all started in 1994 when Keith Mann and Angie Hamp were arrested and when the VPSG work started to try to ensure that their vegan rights were addressed.

For the first couple of years there were no time to raise funds and we started work with an old manual typewriter and a telephone. However as it was only meant to stay in existence for a couple of years this didn't appear to be much of a problem.

Then Greg Avery and Dave Callender heard about the changes we were making and requested our help and our work slowly grew into the organisation it is today. People started to hear about our work and a second hand fax machine arrived and then Alan [now our Webmaster] came on board and refreshed my knowledge about computers.

With the help of Caralyn [now sadly deceased] the Prison Service Guidelines were accepted by the Prison Service in 1996 and shortly afterwards a computer was donated.

### Today

Today VPSG has regular supporters a little office and a small team of dedicated volunteers. Pauline and Greta our two caseworkers are very efficient and are still weaving their way through prison rules and regulations. Gavin is now helping where he can after serving a short spell in prison.

Our Advisory Committee, compiled of ex-prisoners Heather, Natasha, Greg, Mel and Tony, who provide expert advice to caseworkers on any prisoner problem encountered.

## Prisoner News - Dave Blenkinsop

**This article is intended to explain the circumstances of Dave Blenkinsop's trial and the prison sentences he has received.**

### Cass arrest

In May 2001 Dave Blenkinsop was arrested for attacking Brian Cass on 22<sup>nd</sup> February that year, and was initially charged with wounding contrary to Section 18 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861. This carried a potential sentence of life imprisonment.

The principal evidence against him was a balaclava found close to the scene of the attack, from which a DNA sample identical to Dave's was recovered.

Items of clothing and baseball bats were also recovered in the same locality and these were used to strengthen the case against Dave. The police forensic expert said that fibres found on these items matched indistinguishable fibres found on the balaclava and also on clothing worn by Mr Cass on the day of his attack.

The case was then bolstered further by a witness who claimed that some time prior to the attack he heard someone who could have been Dave referring to an incident due to take place on the 22<sup>nd</sup> February, the day of the attack. And another "expert" was able to say that Dave's car could be identified from CCTV footage in St Ives, where Cass lived, on the day of the attack.

### Police Constabulary Project

The replies Sarah has received so far have now been added to the website. Next month she will be despatching to every constabulary her first new sheet which she hopes to produce quarterly.

This news sheet will outline which Constabularies have replied and which ones are dragging their heels. It will also contain the research being conducted at the moment on suppliers of vegan toiletries and bedding. More next newsletter from Sarah on her progress.

### Catering Information Pack

The Catering Information Pack mentioned in our last newsletter has now been printed and despatched to all 135 prisons and we are at the moment compiling our first prison news sheet which we are planning to produce quarterly. This news sheet will contain up to date information on prison food/toiletry items and other useful information.

### Second Website Launched

A copy of this news sheet will be installed on our new prison website [www.vpsg.info](http://www.vpsg.info) together with report/updates on our work. We are hoping that this new website will not only keep police and prisons caring for

our vegan prisoners well informed, but hope that supporters interested in our work will log on from time to time.

Our supporters website will remain the same [www.vpsg.org](http://www.vpsg.org). This website is being redesigned by Clare as Alan has his hands full with the new website.

### Washing / Prison Shops

We are trying to ensure that a suitable bar soap is added to the list of hygiene products and continuing to work on our concern that vegans are not sufficiently catered for by the majority of prison shops.

We are confident that our concerns are slowly being addressed and will keep you updated in our next newsletter. If you have access to our websites you will be able to keep up to date by logging on.

Prisoners are always writing to let us know they are so grateful to you, their supporters, for ensuring we as volunteers have sufficient funds in order to continue our work. We never forget that although we have give our time and effort without you supporting us we would not be here. Thanks.

Jo-Ann

## Prisoner News - Dave Blenkinsop

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### CPS offer

In August 2000 shortly before the trial was due to take place, the CPS offered to drop the Section 18 charge to a section 20 GBH if Dave agreed to plead guilty. Section 20 carries a maximum of 5 years imprisonment, and Dave would in addition be eligible for a further discount for pleading guilty.

The evidence against Dave for the GBH was strong enough for there to be a substantial risk that he would be found guilty.

Dave's car was clearly not on the CCTV in St Ives that day and the witness who claimed to have heard Dave talking about the attack described someone completely unlike Dave and was unable to identify him in a line-up. But the evidence of Dave's DNA on the balaclava was indisputable and the fibre evidence linking the balaclava to the attack on Cass was – although open to question – potentially enough to convince a jury that he was guilty.

Dave could not afford to take that risk and on the 16<sup>th</sup> August 2001 he pleaded guilty to the lesser Section 20 charge. The judge sentenced him to 3 years imprisonment.

### Newchurch Guinea Pigs

Shortly after Dave was initially charged with attacking Brian Cass he was also charged with the burglary of 600 guinea pigs from David Hall & Partners in Newchurch, Staffordshire in September 1999.

Again the evidence was based on DNA evidence, this time recovered from a fragment of latex glove found at the scene of the burglary.

Although this was the only evidence the prosecution had, it was felt again that this might well be enough to convict him and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2001 Dave pleaded guilty and received a sentence of 18 months in prison, to run consecutively to the sentence David

was already serving for Cass and making a total of 4 and a half years.

The judge said he would have given him 3 years had he been found guilty at trial. One of the aggravating factors when it came to sentence was the so-called "intimidatory" spray painting inside the sheds stating that Shamrock had been closed and that they were next.



A major consequence of Dave receiving the 18-month sentence for Newchurch was that Dave was now a "long term prisoner".

This term applies to anyone who is serving a prison term of 4 years or more. It meant that Dave would have to apply for parole at the midway point of his sentence, rather than being automatically released on license, which would have been the

case had he been serving less than 4 years. If denied parole, Dave would have to serve a minimum of two thirds of his sentence. So instead of looking forward to a release after 18 months, Dave was potentially looking at a total of 3 years in prison.

### Mutch Meats

So it wasn't the best of results, but at least he had a release date to look forward to, at last without the stress of charges hanging over him.

However this was to be short lived. On 11<sup>th</sup> December 2001, just 8 days after being sentenced for the Newchurch burglary, police officers from Oxfordshire visited Dave in prison and arrested him on suspicion of being in possession of explosive substances and of causing an explosion, contrary to sections 2 and 3 of the Explosive Substances Act 1883.

This was in relation to an arson attack at Mutch Meats, a slaughterhouse in Witney, Oxfordshire, on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2000, where ten incendiary devices were placed under meat lorries destroying one of them – the others did not go off. On the 17<sup>th</sup> December 2001

Dave was subsequently charged with the above offences. The evidence was again based on DNA. This time DNA matching Dave's was recovered from the fuse assembly of one of the devices which did not go off.

On this occasion however the evidence was weak. The amount of DNA recovered was so small that it was impossible to tell how long it had been there, or how it was transferred. Indeed it was possible that Dave's DNA could have been transferred to the device via a third party without having actually touched it himself, so the evidence was circumstantial at best.

continued on pg 9



# Prisoner Letters - Rae Schilling



**As I approach the end of my sentence** which if Home Detention Curfew (tagging) is approved will be in early May, this seems an ideal opportunity for me to express my gratitude to groups and individuals who have supported and encouraged, and on occasions inspired me over the last year and a half.

Thank you everyone for your letters and cards and for sharing with me some of your life on the out, the A.R.'s movement continues to gain strength and momentum as more people join together in the struggle worldwide.

To VPSG who enable Jo-Ann to continue to campaign for the rights of V.A.R.P.O.C.; looking to a future I'm sure when we will be recognised in the same way as other minority groups, be it on grounds of religion, culture or ethics, each presenting specific needs. A time when resistance, apathy and ignorance towards Vegans is no more. Jo-Ann, to say that I appreciate all that you have achieved for me is an understatement, you have worked tirelessly (sorry, not a good word, at times you must have been exhausted) to ensure that both my food and toiletry requirements have been met. I owe you!

To ALFSG for their financial support, also for the magazine, always inspiring reading, thank you.

To Grisby who was liberated along with Cathy and Clin from a French laboratory and now live out their precious lives in the sanctuary of Monkey World in Dorset. Grisby's photograph is pinned on my cell wall and the truth of what her survival represents has been a constant reminder to me, not only of why I am here, but of who the REAL victims are. Animal Liberation! Finally to Sarah who has served this sentence with me on the other side of the wall. Yes, together we ARE strong! Poetic justice, maybe.....

Until all are free.

Stay strong!  
Rae.

**Rae was released  
from prison on 6 May**

## Poetic Justice

I am the freedom that you supposed that you took.  
On that day, from the life that you shook.  
Supposition though is a dangerous tool  
when employed to measure, with the absence of  
rule.

It possessed too much held deep within,  
to fail to survive, to struggle, to win.  
Now the day approaches...  
this time, my day not yours,  
when I shall no longer be held by  
restrictions and laws.

Liberty awaits! Anxious to give me her hand,  
ready to embrace me, to share her fair land.  
So I shall walk tall with night on my side,  
to the freedom I own, for too long denied.

Freedom of expression, freedom of space.  
The liberty to live..... to love, and to do so  
with grace.  
So come, let us celebrate, destiny call,  
whispering gently, "I've been patiently waiting  
beyond these high walls".

No sadness, no regrets, no time to look back,  
pain washed away...  
in the stream of my tears, covering the tracks.  
Nothing lost. Much has been gained.  
Look! A rainbow... where once it rained.

Rae Schilling. March 03



# (ex)Prisoner Letters - Kevin White

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I was one of the 5 people arrested and imprisoned after a peaceful demo outside the home of a Marsh UK (HLS insurance broker) director in October 2002. At the thought of going to prison for the first time, I was, obviously, a little anxious but to a lesser degree than my first stay in hospital, just 4 months previously, for an operation on my cheekbone. Even though my stay in hospital was short (24 hours) I've got no doubt which of these establishments I'd rather re-visit!

In hospital, I was in a lot of pain, stressed out, drugged up, isolated and depressed. During my month inside, I experienced none of these. It was a great opportunity to relax, evaluate our strategy, plan for the future and rediscover the fitness I lost some years ago. The highlight of each day was when a guard turned up with a pile of mail. I spent hours reading and replying to as many as possible.

None of this would have been possible without the hard work and dedication of the VPSG because they took away all my worries about obtaining a good, balanced, vegan diet. After VPSG's advice, Canterbury kitchen staff were on the ball from day

one providing numerous, delicious, hot meals and a plentiful supply of soya milk, fruit, marmite etc.

Most people will be aware that my mother was also incarcerated for the same offence. Despite her age and illness, she managed very well in Holloway and came out fighting just as hard as before! We would

like to thank everyone who wrote to/ visited us, those who cared for our pets at home and the VPSG for helping me to enjoy a holiday that was far more preferable than another stay in hospital!!

Always at the front of my mind, was the knowledge that we were there for the best possible reasons - saving life, creating justice and delivering freedom!

- “Always at the front
- of my mind, was the
- knowledge that we
- were there for the
- best possible reasons
- - saving life, creating
- justice and delivering
- freedom!”

Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty  
[www.shac.net](http://www.shac.net) 0845 458 0630

Save The Newchurch Guinea Pigs  
[www.guineapigs.org.uk](http://www.guineapigs.org.uk) 01902 564734

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## Prisoner and Court News

### Gillian Bradley, Jonny Ablewhite and Sarah Gisbourne released

Gillian Bradley and Jonny Ablewhite were released on tagging in February. Sarah Gisbourne was released in March.

Gillian and Jonny were serving nine months, and Sarah serving 12 months, in relation to the SHAC campaign.

### Upcoming Trials

Heather Nicholson is in court on Mon 12 May on charges relating to the SHAC campaign.

Sylvia O'Brien is in court on Wed 21 and Thu 22 May on charges relating to the SHAC campaign.

A custodial sentence is possible in both cases, check the web site at the time for updates:  
[www.vpsg.org](http://www.vpsg.org)

### Anti-Hunt Activists Not Guilty

On 17 Feb two anti-hunting campaigners were found not guilty of harassment charges at Maidstone Crown Court after a trial lasting nearly three weeks.

At the trial the spotlight turned away from the defendants and onto the Old Surrey and Burstow

Hunt, and in particular huntsman Graeme Worsley. It was revealed that he instigated a hate campaign against one campaigner and her daughter. He sent threatening emails and made obscene phone calls.

The judge described one police constable, Stan Hebborn, as the 'poodle' of huntsman Graeme Worsley.

The jury were probably left wondering how it came about that the anti-hunt campaigners were on trial and not the hunt and acquitted them.

# Ex-Prisoner's Experience - Mel Broughton



**If you are one of the A/R activists to receive a custodial sentence your first reaction on receiving the news may well be one of shock and trepidation.** If you've already spent some time on remand then you will already have some experience of prison life. If you've never been to prison before then a degree of uncertainty and anxiety is only natural, but lurid stories of prison life are the stuff of t.v land and the tabloid press.

Once you've been processed at the establishment you've been sent to it can feel a bit disorientating as you find your way around your new residence. The first few days can seem a bit of whirl, but things soon settle to a predictable daily routine.

For ethical vegans in prison there can be added problems with regard diet, toiletries and issues concerning non-leather footwear. It is important that as soon as you arrive at the prison that your veganism is made clear to the Senior Officer on your wing, the kitchens and the healthcare centre. It's not uncommon to experience some problems with food in prison and in particular with veganism.

Whilst the prison system in theory recognises the vegan ethic in practice some have difficulty catering for strict ethical vegans. It is important when dealing with problems you take a firm but polite

approach, most prisons use a system of written applications or complaint forms for airing grievances. It can be helpful to build a relationship with kitchen staff so you can aid them and educate them with regard to veganism.

Always remember that the way you deal with problems will be noted, it doesn't usually help to just rant and rave you tend to get further by a more rational approach.

The main enemy in prison is boredom and it is advisable to make as much positive use of your time as you can. Apart from replying to your sack load of mail there may be a chance to undertake educational courses or even Open University Study. It's a good idea to keep your brain active and likewise try to make use of the prison gym as

physical exercise makes in-cell relaxation a lot easier.

The main thing to remember is that you're not isolated, many people will be rooting for you and writing to you.

Visits are always a welcome contact with the outside world and a nice reminder that you will also be free in the not too distant future.

**"There are, believe it or not, some pluses about being incarcerated, the chance to read undisturbed and educate yourself as well as to get fit are all possibilities."**

There are, believe it or not, some pluses about being incarcerated, the chance to read undisturbed and educate yourself as well

as to get fit are all possibilities. The more positive you stay the more benefits you'll get, you may even get the chance to educate some of your fellow prisoners about the a/r cause.

Mel Broughton

# National Vegan Festival

*We are having a stall so do come and visit us!*



## Sun 14 September

### 10am-5pm



**at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square  
London WC1 (nearest tube: Holborn)**

**Admission: Adults 1pound / under 16's free**

# Ex-Prisoner's Experience - Heather Nicholson

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**Even though** I only spent four and a half months in prison at HMP Highpoint VPSG made a big difference to my time there. I have been a strict vegan for most of my life on principle and will continue for the rest of my life. This isn't a fad or a phase it is something I, and other vegans, take very seriously. This obviously doesn't change just because my freedom is taken away.

If vegan food and toiletries aren't provided in prison then I go without. There is no other option. Non vegan food would make me physically sick and I wouldn't eat it if it didn't. I believe that everything other prisoners are entitled to, either provided by the prison or available to buy from the canteen, is what we are entitled to.

Other prisoners can buy hair extensions, etc and tobacco in prison, most of which are clearly not necessary for your health and

are either luxury items or a drug. We aren't asking for such luxuries, just the vegan basics to remain in good health.



Jo-Ann from VPSG worked very hard on both my own and Natasha's behalf while we were at Highpoint. We were sent toiletries and washing powder as soon as we arrived. The prison were a bit slow giving it to us, but when we told the prison officers that we hadn't been able to wash for a week, because we couldn't without

vegan soap, we had our pack within hours. We pointed out also that we had had a lecture from them on the importance of hygiene and the dangers of contagious diseases and then they were withholding our soap!

Stuart Head the kitchen manager was very helpful and we had many meetings with him and other kitchen staff about our diet. Between Jo-Ann, Stuart and ourselves we managed to sort out a separate vegan canteen list which provided us with toiletries, soya desserts, chocolate, muesli and other vegan essentials, especially my lip balm.

Our calcium and B12 requirements were explained to the prison and VPSG had all the facts and figures at their fingertips. Thanks to them we had free soya milk with calcium and the biggest tubs of marmite I

continued on page 10

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## VPSG News - Greta (VPSG Caseworker)

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**Since our last newsletter the VPSG has attended a number of meetings within the prison service.** Our aim, as ever, is to improve the conditions for vegans held at her majesties pleasure and to ensure that vegans are offered equal opportunities in line with options available to non vegan prisoners.

### HMP Holloway

One of the meetings was with the catering manager at HMP Holloway. The meeting took place in the kitchen area and we received an open and welcoming reception. The staff showed a knowledge of vegan issues, and a keen interest in the vegan training pack that has just been sent to all prisons in England.

We were shown around the kitchen area and were pleased to find the existence of a 'special' diet area. This is an area for the preparation and storage, inc refrigeration, of food for vegan and vegetarian diets.

Unfortunately the current guidelines for the vegetarian diet include fish at this point in time - the VPSG are at present negotiating this issue.

Drawing on feedback from vegans who have experienced the prison system, there was much discussion on areas of concern and suggested solutions.

The catering manager was responsive to ideas and had much input to solutions. Since our meeting there has been visible progress and good communications

between ourselves and the catering staff at HMP Holloway.

### HM Prison Service

Another of our meetings was with the HM Prison Service. The aim of this meeting was to share information in order to confirm which products are approved as acceptable to Vegans.

One of the main issues to be raised was the situation with prison shops and the lack of supplies available for vegans to purchase within them.

On this issue it was agreed that the VPSG would compile a list of suggested items for prison shops to stock, falling under the headings of essential items and nice things.

continued overleaf

# Ex-Prisoner's Experience - Keith Mann

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**I'm told I'm stubborn by nature, but I see me as determined.**

Either way I can be rather annoying when I set my mind to something, I'm told! Even little things like margarine with whey powder in it has caused me to get revolutionary and initiate a campaign.

That was in prison of course where such things are a priority. Bigger fish to fry now, so to speak, like the dairy industry. The other obvious thing here is that the power of a prisoner is limited and embarking on campaigns aimed at your captors isn't necessarily the sensible approach.

But the sensible - sit quietly on your arse - approach isn't going to get you fed by the uninterested prison service, or anything else you want in any other arena.

Reasonable and rational arguments and persistence won me animal friendly toothpaste and other such niceties in some prisons, but progress was usually slow and reluctant, else it wasn't even that. They simply ignore you, lose the paperwork, move you, or a combination of all three. How they managed to lose so much amazed me.

So I tipped the wink at the ever ready VPSG, where donations and

volunteers are less prevalent than vegan prisoner cries for help.

VPSG workers, and Jo-Ann in particular, is similar in her determination to remove animal exploitation from human existence, and she can be very annoying with it! Interesting she chose the prison service for her effort, but what a good idea that was!

**"For me she's one of the best friends I had through my imprisonment."**

For me she's one of the best friends I had through my imprisonment. To my shame that isn't reflected in the time we've spent together

since I came out, but she will always be, as the founder and guiding light of VPSG, an invaluable asset to the frontline of the a/r movement who are at risk of being contained. And of course the animals, for who this little organisation ultimately serves.

I lost count of the number of times I was called into the Governor's office or that of a lesser official to be told that "That vagan stuff you've been whinging about has been cleared. You might want to let the VPSG know; save us all a lot of work." That'll be the vagan stuff I "can whinge about till the cows come home. Or go to the slaughterhouse! Ha ha ha", eh Gov? They can ignore inmates but the people they serve, like Jo-Ann,

they have some problem with thankfully.

All that said, such prisoner support isn't the preserve of a small number of people called the Vegan Prisoner Support Group, there is work we can all do to make things easier for our prisoners, as these pages explain, but for those of us with too many other things as priorities and a bit of spare cash, that will without question contribute greatly to the VPSG war effort.

Vegan prisoners in question don't read the PS.

PS. Sainsbury's do a whoppin' vegan product guide in which there are disgusting things like lollies and those sherbert filled flying saucers that kids (and Keith) love. There are loads of other goodies too, but that's not all good. Our first trip with our newly acquired vegan bible addition cost us dear as we scanned the aisles for new stuff to try and put most of them in the trolley. Expensive it can be but for those of you in there who ignored me it's definitely something to look forward to if you do the supermarkets.

For the animals

Keith Mann

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## VPSG News (continued from previous page)

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To date the list has been completed and returned to the Prison Service, who in turn have sent a list of suggested items to the VPSG.

Items on this list are currently being researched with regards to their suitability for vegans.

While the VPSG spends much of its resources ensuring that vegan

prisoners are provided with basic vegan provisions, regular meals and hygiene products, it is hoped that in the future vegan options will be integrated in to the system.

The afore-mentioned meeting is certainly a step in this direction.

Once prisoners receive their basic rights, without the intervention of

the VPSG, in all of her majesties establishments maybe the equal opportunities in line with provisions available to non vegan prisoners will be soon to follow.

Greta



### **HLS workers**

On the 5<sup>th</sup> February 2001 the police visited Dave in prison again and charged him with causing explosions, this time in relation to the 5 arson attacks on cars belonging to workers at Huntingdon Life Sciences in Godmanchester, Huntingdon on 28<sup>th</sup> August 2000.

The evidence was that fibres were found on a device which failed to ignite at Godmanchester, which they said matched similar fibres found in Dave's jacket pocket at the time of his arrest for Cass.

The other evidence was that the devices at Godmanchester and Mutch Meats were of very similar design, and that there were further similarities between fibres found on the device and those found on the abandoned garments alleged to be used in the attack on Cass, for which Dave had admitted responsibility.

These charges were subsequently added to the Mutch Meats charges, so that Dave was facing 17 counts altogether, 15 of conspiracy to cause explosives on the various vehicles and 2 of possessing items with the intent to cause explosions.

However the Attorney General's consent is required to prosecute for offences under the Explosive's Act 1883 and this was refused. The charges were amended accordingly to 5 counts of arson, 10 of conspiracy to cause arson and 2 of possessing items with intent to cause criminal damage. The arson charges carried a maximum of life imprisonment, and the possession charges a maximum of ten years.

### **The Case Against**

The case against Dave appeared to be very weak. Two pieces of circumstantial evidence – the DNA at Mutch Meats and the fibres at HLS – were linked together by the similarity in design of the devices at each location. If either the DNA or the fibre evidence could be

eliminated as inadmissible, then the fragile house of cards on which the case rested would have collapsed.

However things took a turn for the worse in November 2002, just 3 weeks before the scheduled trial date, at a pre-trial hearing to discuss the admissibility of certain evidence. After further analysis of the fibres found in Dave's jacket and on the device from Godmanchester, both the defence and prosecution forensic experts concluded that they were in fact indistinguishable and that there were far more of them on the device than had been initially stated.

It was also looking likely that the judge was going to admit as relevant evidence of Dave's previous convictions and in particular of his involvement in the attack on Cass, as it would be evidence of motive for his planting the devices at Huntingdon.

If he went to trial and was found guilty on just the two counts of possessing explosives, the consensus seemed to be that he would get 16 years. If he were found guilty on all counts, he may even have received a life sentence.

### **Plea**

On this basis Dave did a deal with the CPS. They said they would drop the 15 arson charges if he pleaded guilty to the two counts of possession. Dave accepted this if the judge would indicate that he would give him 2 concurrent sentences, meaning that the maximum he could receive would be ten years. The judge refused to give Dave this guarantee, so the CPS amalgamated the two possession charges in to one, meaning the maximum sentence Dave could receive would be ten years.

The CPS also accepted as evidence Dave's written statement that, in helping to make the devices, he did not intend to endanger life, only property. This meant that the judge

would have to sentence him on this basis. The CPS were clearly keen to do a deal but it should not be assumed from this that they did not have a case. The reasons were straight forward enough. They got their result – a conviction – and did not have to run the risk of Dave receiving a not guilty verdict after trial. Dave, by pleading guilty, could ensure that the judge would not throw away the key. Dave pleaded guilty on this basis, and the other arson charges were dismissed, meaning that Dave can not be charged with them again.

### **Sentence**

On December 12th 2002 Dave was sentenced to 5 and a half years in prison to run consecutively to the 4 and a half he was already serving. Although the maximum sentence possible was ten years, the judge had to reduce it by a third for his pleading guilty.

Additional mitigating factors were that Dave was a model prisoner – he received character references from prison education staff - and that he had not intended to endanger life.

This now means that Dave has been imprisoned for a total of ten years in prison, starting from 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2001. He will first become eligible for parole after 5 years in 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2006, and if he does not get parole he will be released on license after a total of 6 years and 8 months in February 2008.

.....

Current address:  
Dave Blenkinsop (EM7899),  
HMP Bullingdon,  
Patrick Haugh Road,  
Arncott,  
Bicester,  
Oxfordshire OX6 0PZ.

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# Ex-Prisoner's Experience - Clare

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**Your experience in prison can really vary depending on different situations you find yourself in.** I have been to prison a few times and so far my visits have been relatively short so that is the perspective that I come from. The longest was less than a couple of months.

One time I was locked up about 23 hours each day, and to be honest, I found it quite a peaceful time. I read a lot, rested up and spent quite a bit of time working out what focus to take when I was released

from prison. This turned out to be very useful.

Another time I went in for a couple days with a fellow activist. We were on the same wing and it was a completely different experience.

You often get the chance to do sport/gym and education as well.

Something important in any prison is to be firm and stand your ground right from the start, doesn't matter how petty it is. There is the odd prisoner who will push other prisoners around if they think they

can get away with it. It could be about something as stupid as jumping the queue, that has been known to start a riot. But also relax, you are special so don't forget it.

Getting vegan food is often difficult and this is where the VPSG come in. They will liaise with the prison with regards to your diet and do their best to ensure that you are offered suitable food. Same goes for toiletries. On one prison stay I went nearly 2 weeks without toiletries despite repeatedly asking

continued on next page

## Greetings from the 'Bar View' Hotel by Sonia Hayward (continued from front page)

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There are good facilities here. They cook your food for you. There is a gym, a very good library, and a TV room, so I can catch up on news and soaps. In fact it's just like Butlins – only difference, everyone, (except me) is on drugs. As far as I can see so far, the prison service is just mopping up a huge drug problem.

I love hearing about your animals and what's going on in the Animal Rights movement. For those of you who write and ask if I need anything, thanks, but I have everything I need, please spend your money on phone cards,

stamps and petrol and do all that SHAC/SAHC/SNGP ask of you.

Best Wishes

Love n liberation  
Sonia XXXXX

### Update on Sonia

Sonia is now working in the sewing department for the wage of £5.50 per week. She says at least this pays for her to be able to hire a small t.v. for her cell for a week. She also says that HMP Cookham Wood is catering for her vegan

requirements admirably and are doing all they can to ensure that she is offered equal opportunities.

A lot of work was done at HMP Rochester [who also cater for Cookham Wood] when Tony Humphries was there and great advancements were made, for example at the moment when the other prisoners have chocolate pudding, ice cream or yoghurts a vegan alternative is often provided for Sonia. If all prisons were as conscientious our work would be halved!

VPSG

## Ex-Prisoner's Experience - Heather Nicholson (continued from page 7)

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have ever seen in my life provided weekly. I still think there is not enough raw food provided in the prison diet. Our 'punishment' is our loss of freedom but no-one has the right to cause our health to suffer too.

We were lucky at Highpoint I have heard horrendous stories from other prisons and I hear that some

vegan prisoners are still having problems in obtaining vegan products from their prison shop and their diet. It is not acceptable to be forced to live for years on poor quality, over cooked stodge.

Hopefully one day thanks to VPSG all prisons will follow standard guidelines for providing all vegan prisoners with a more than

adequate diet and ensure that we are not discriminated against because of our vegan lifestyle.

Heather Nicholson

**Released April 2002**

# Supporters Letters

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Send letters for inclusion in the Autumn edition to:  
VPSG, PO Box 194, Enfield EN1 4YL.

Dear VPSG,

Just a line to say thank you for all your hard work recently. I was really expecting to go to Holloway but it turns out I had been, probably, illegally detained for 4 days! Lawyers are straight on the case!

I must say the food at Charing Cross police station was not bad, mainly chips and one salad and after pointing out to the custody sergeant that PACE states food can be brought in for a prisoner from outside I did quite well food wise.

I was also allowed to use my own vegan toiletries which I now carry with me everywhere with clean underwear 'just in case' (oh yes and a good book!). I wonder if we should suggest such things as prudent to activists to take such essentials with them on demos. It certainly made my life easier and different police stations and different custody sergeants seem to have a different point of view on what can and can't be brought in.

Thanks again for your time. It is really appreciated and it helps to know that someone cares and cuts the isolation a bit.

Love and respect.

Lyn.

**"I was also allowed to use my own vegan toiletries which I now carry with me everywhere with clean underwear 'just in case' (oh yes and a good book!). I wonder if we should suggest such things as prudent to activists to take such essentials with them on demos."**



Dear VPSG,

Thanks for the details you posted to me. I have read each newsletter in turn and am very moved by the individual accounts of these caring, compassionate and dedicated people who are steadfast in their conscience and have forsaken their day to day liberty and freedom. I believe they are all 'Beacons of Light in the glare on an injustice'.

The importance of your supportive and valuable assistance to the prisoners who face a hostile enough an environment in the prison system is truly to be applauded.

Being in the prison system with such firm principles must be even more difficult. Thanks for being the steering force behind this excellent movement.

Yvonne.

## Ex-Prisoner's Experience - Clare

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(cont. from previous page)

if the pack sent in by the VPSG had arrived. Finally I let the VPSG know there were problems, next day I got my toiletries!

Another time I was held over the weekend at a police station. I was having problems getting some belongings that had been handed in to me. The VPSG phoned no less than 17 times to assist me. This is just one example of the persistence and dedication that has taken them far.

If you are worried about prison you will likely be amazed at how well you cope. Often prison makes you stronger, in some ways it can be a positive experience, if that is what you want it to be. But don't be hard on yourself when you are feeling fed up, just work through it. As with the outside world, prison has its ups and downs.

So, sit back, enjoy the letters, do some thinking, get fit, do some learning and/or work out your strategies. Some of the things that can be available in prison.

Clare

## VPSG 24 hr Emergency Arrest Line

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**07743 536 114**

If you are arrested just call this number and we will call you back.

# Vegan Prisoners Support Group

PO Box 194, Enfield, Middx EN1 4YL, United Kingdom.

Emergency Arrest Line: 07743 536 114 (we will call you back)

Office/fax: +44 (0)20 82 92 83 25 E-mail: [info@vpsg.org](mailto:info@vpsg.org) Web: [www.vpsg.org](http://www.vpsg.org)

PLEASE NOTE: Once you have completed the following standing order form, please return to VPSG, not your bank

## STANDING ORDER FORM

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

Your Address \_\_\_\_\_

To The Manager

Name of Bank \_\_\_\_\_

Branch \_\_\_\_\_

Bank's Address \_\_\_\_\_

Bank's Sort Code   -   -   Bank Account Number \_\_\_\_\_

Please pay on the  /  /  and on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of every month until further notice, the sum of £  for the credit of VEGAN PRISONERS SUPPORT GROUP.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Please check our website for regular updates [www.vpsg.org](http://www.vpsg.org)**

As we are a non-profitmaking organisation with no paid staff, we run on a very tight budget. Supporting the VPSG is important to enable continued support for animal rights prisoners who have risked their freedom for the benefit of their non-human relatives. All donations are directly ploughed back into helping vegan animal rights prisoners of conscience.

A monthly donation of £1.00 (roughly 25 pence a week) will help ensure that we stay in existence. Your support in this way is most vital and gratefully received.

# Vegan Prisoners Support Group

Newsletter, September 2003

## Sonia Hayward Released On Tagging



**On 11 August Sonia was released on tagging, she wrote the following letter just after she was released:**

I was initially taken to Holloway, after four days I was taken to HMP Cookham Wood for the rest of my sentence.

Locking me up was the worse thing they did because it took all the fear away. Prison is really no big deal. Absolutely nothing nasty happened to me. I was never bullied, nor accosted in the showers or ever forced to take drugs. All the things I was worried about before I arrived. I think the worse thing that happened to me was someone stole some toiletries once.

I was genuinely moved by the quantity of mail I received. I'd sit in my cell and be transported all over the world. The animals have friends everywhere. My letters, visits and daily phone calls were vital in sustaining my

spirits while in jail. I am very well aware there were other girls there who never had mail or visits, and subsequently were not coping well.

While I was in prison I heard on the news that the Hunting Bill was going to go through, and weekly, companies would pull away from HLS.

I made some friends and had some really good laughs. There were no major problems with food or toiletries, I even received a parcel from Lush. I couldn't believe my luck.

The kitchen staff bent over backwards to be helpful, and I can't fault their efforts. There was a vegan option every day. A very tasty brunch at weekends. From time to time I got Yofu yogurts, Toffuti Ice Cream, Chocolate Fudge Puddings and Provamel desserts. I also had an excellent vegan pack every week. This is due to the work of the VPSG a few years ago when Tony Humphries was in adjacent HMP Rochester.

I didn't make it to the Gym as much as I'd intended to. But I didn't get older without getting wiser. I spent time reading loads of Animal Rights books and am a much more knowledgeable campaigner for the cause.

Love 'n' liberation  
Sonia.

P.S. It was really great to hear from everyone who wrote, and took the time to visit me. Thanks.

### In this issue:

- Letters from prisoners
- Writing to prisoners
- Recent news on arrests and trials
- An ex-prisoner gives his experience of being vegan in prison.
- Your questions answered

## Current Prisoners

**Dave Blenkinsop** (EM7899),  
HMP Bullingdon,  
Patrick Haugh Road,  
Arncott,  
Bicester,  
Oxfordshire OX6 0PZ.

Serving ten years in all; three years for the attack on HLS boss Brian Cass, 18 months for liberating 600 guinea pigs at Newchurch, and 5½ years for planting incendiary devices under abattoir lorries and HLS staff cars. All sentences to run consecutively.

You may also wish to write to **Tony Haughian** (JM9774), HMP Pentonville, Caledonian Road, London N7 8TT.

Tony is not in prison on animal rights related charges, but is well known for years of activism within the animal rights movement.

## Contact VPSG

### Postal Address:

PO Box 194, Enfield, Middx EN1 4YL,  
United Kingdom.

### Emergency Arrest Line:

07743 536 114 (we will call you back)

**Office/fax:** +44 (0)20 8292 8325

**E-mail:** [info@vpsg.org](mailto:info@vpsg.org)

**Web:** [www.vpsg.org](http://www.vpsg.org)

## Latest News

Neil Bartlett was released on parole on 28 August.

Disclaimer: The views in the VPSG newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor. Responsibility can not be taken for the accuracy of statements made by contributors or the verification of material sent to VPSG for inclusion in the Newsletter.



# Editorial

**The months** go by so quickly here at the VPSG office and I can't believe it's time for another newsletter.

## Prison News Sheet

We have since our last newsletter produced two prison news sheets which we are planning to compile and despatch quarterly and the response from prisons has been really good. These news sheets are despatched to 'No 1' Governors, Catering Managers and Prison Shops at every prison. The last couple of months have seen the increase of prisons contacting the office to take advantage of our free research offer or to request further information on the specialist subject of 'veganism'.

## Catering Information Pack

Since the arrival of our Catering Information Pack in all prisons earlier this year the attitude has altered considerably when caseworkers call to discuss problems. Most prisons are now willing to discuss and often make the alterations that we recommend.

## VPSG Info Site

The new website [www.vpsg.info](http://www.vpsg.info) is also being frequently visited and contains nutritional information on the vegan diet and many recipes that we hope supporters can/will also take advantage of by visiting our site. The site is constantly being updated by Alan with the results of our work and we think well worth visiting from time to time.

## Case Worker and Office News

Greta and Pauline [our two caseworkers] are shortly being joined by Debbie next month who has been

coming into the office for the past month to become familiar with the work. Clare is at the moment updating our old website [www.vpsg.org](http://www.vpsg.org) and this will be on-line in the next month or so. She has also been busy compiling our prison news sheets and supporters news letters and does a brilliant job in organising their despatch - a back breaking task. Paul, our latest volunteer, found himself busy in preparing the mailout and the compilation of the prison news sheet on his 1st day.

Although caseworkers now work from their own homes to give their prisoners any help they request, the general running of the office still remains as always in Enfield, but without Clare and Debbie's help the work wouldn't move as quickly as it does.

## Veggie Burgermix Trials

At the moment we are conducting trials of Veggies' burgermix in prisons; as some of the present vegan products leave a lot to be desired. The prisons that have participated so far have found the product to be very versatile and popular with prisoners. More news on this in our next newsletter.

## Prison Shop Project

We are still working on the Prison Shop project, [the only source of prisoners being able to purchase their requirements]. At the moment there are plenty of 'luxury items' for prisoners in most prison shops, but few of the basic vegan necessities like soap, moisturiser, nuts, seeds, dried fruits, fresh fruit, supplements etc. Greta has been working on the

majority of the work connected to this project which entails conducting lots of research. This means hour after hour on the internet sourcing and researching vegan alternatives for recommendation to the prison service. Without all this tedious work the deadlines for the Prison Shop project would not be possible.

We continue to recommend the Special Order Scheme, in place in some prisons. An update of our progress will be included in our next newsletter.

## Other News

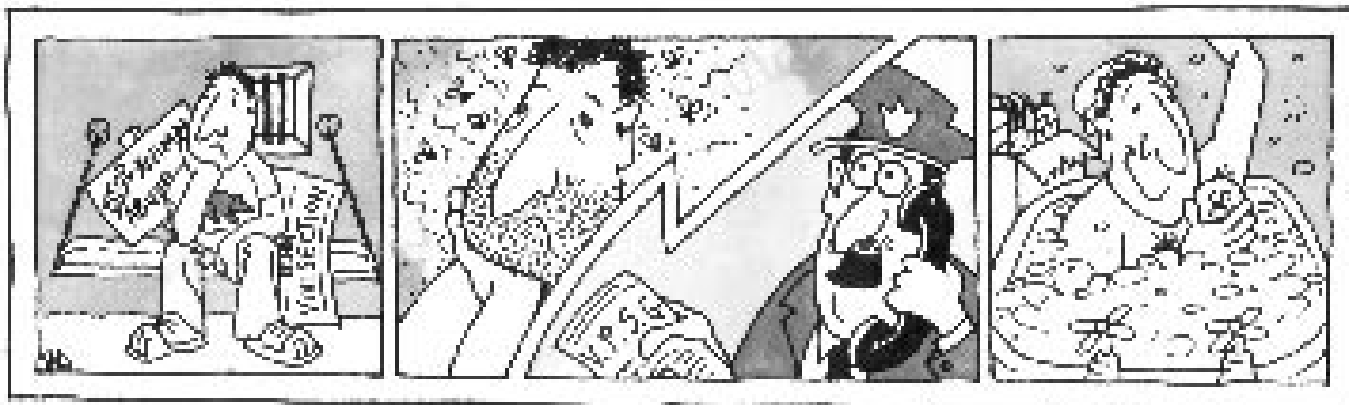
Clare has written to all the PECS [People Escort Courier Services] who transport anyone detained within the prison system from police stations/prisons to court and is waiting for their replies.

Sarah continues to work single handed on the Police Project, and a lots of the results are available on the website [www.vpsg.info](http://www.vpsg.info).

The Prisoner Advisory Committee Heather, Greg, Natasha, Mel and Tony are always available for their expert advice and the information they provide to caseworkers is invaluable in their day to day dealing with prisons.

Obviously, all the hard work volunteers put into the running of the VPSG wouldn't be possible without the funds provided by all you supporters, so thanks for continuing to finance our work.

Jo-Ann



# (ex)Prisoner Letters - Rae Schilling

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Dear Supporters,

I guess that you are aware that I am once more on the out and have recently completed my three months of tagging so am no longer subject to a curfew. The most amazing part of all is being able to go out on the evening walk with Sarah and Tag, I really do feel 'free' now.

I thought you might like to read **\*\*A Prisoner of No Comparison** which I wrote in the early days while still on remand in Holloway, up until now it hasn't been published in this country. It won the 'Virago' award for prose and was displayed as part of the 'Koestler' 2002 exhibition which was held in London for some weeks.

We will never know what impact our words, spoken or written will have, we just hold on to truth and right and our belief that justice will prevail and that our resolve will quicken the end result – Animal Rights!

For Ziggy, Perry, Burma and Hamish who couldn't stay until I came home. R.I.P.

Until all are free.

Stay strong!

Rae x

**\*\*See page 9-10**

## VPSG Prison Visits - Mel (Advisor)

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**As an advisor** to the VPSG I recently visited Dave Blenkinsop at HMP Bullingdon to discuss with him any problems he was experiencing with his vegan diet in prison.

One thing you have to be acutely aware of when trying to improve things for vegan prisoners, is that they are the ones on the receiving end of whatever moves you make on their behalf, so each step needs to be discussed carefully with each prisoner. It also has to be borne in mind that some establishments are more progressive than others in terms of acting on advice that is offered. I was given a discretionary visit which the VPSG had arranged; this meant we had a two hour visit in closed conditions.

It was soon discovered that Dave had experienced many of the same problems that other A/R prisoners experienced in obtaining a vegan diet in a prison, many of these difficulties are due to a lack of knowl-

edge about veganism and some are down to the prison management. One of the major problems strict vegans face in a prison environment is the fact that their ethical way of life puts them at once in a category of their own, having said this a/r prisoners have achieved much through their own efforts with the support of the VPSG's hard work and experience.

In Dave's case his problems obtaining and maintaining an adequate vegan diet seems to be due to a lack of communication within the prison system. One example of this is the problem Dave is having with a regular provision of the recommended amount of soya milk [i.e 3 1/2 soya milk] and a vegan salad in the weekly menu cycle. Although a number of approaches by Pauline, his caseworker, have met with promises of a remedy to the situation by the prison management, in practice these still fail to be acted upon by the kitchen staff.

Pauline is still working on these issues.

Similarly Dave has not been able to order any vegan supplements or extras via the weekly canteen order. Despite some of the problems Dave has experienced with his diet he was in good spirits and we had a good visit during the two hours.

Talking first hand with vegan prisoners about the problems they are having gives you direct insight and can only be of benefit in the long term. Helping to obtain a fair deal for vegans in prison is an on-going job which is undertaken by some very hard working volunteers. Dave and other vegan prisoners deserve all the support and help we can give them, the VPSG through it's initial work and dialogue with prisons is continuing to make sure that support is always there.

Mel Broughton

## VPSG News - Pauline (Case Worker)

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**Helping the** VPSG out sort of just happened. The supportive and regular contact which I had so much appreciated when Mel found himself in prison continued throughout his sentence and developed naturally into helping out wherever or whenever I could on his release.

Initially there was an element of trepidation, certainly on my part, computers, fax machines; and printers were like aliens in my home. My experience with such technology was non-existent and initially I found it confusing and a little daunting. It's now been several months and whilst I can now write a letter, send e-mails as well

as look at the web etc. and what's more enjoy doing it, I think Jo-Ann has given up trying to knock me into shape as a computer whizz!

I now feel the knowledge I've gained helps me deal effectively with the telephone work and have thoroughly enjoyed handling the prison contact and case worker files. The insight the work has given me into the different co-operation given by prisons when trying to obtain the information I need for my work varies so much, sometimes it can be so easy to access from one prison and at other times impregnable from another, has been a real eye opener.

Responses are vastly different and sometimes it is difficult to believe you are dealing with the same body of people.

Like, I am sure, the other volunteers at VPSG, the work slowly brings realisation into what a monumental task establishing and running the VPSG so effectively over the past years must have been. I have come to respect and admire the efficiency and dedication contributed by the volunteers and hope the support of our work continues in the future.

Pauline Broughton

### Vegan Toiletries in Prison

The following prison issue toiletries have been confirmed suitable for vegans and not tested on animals

- The Collection - Hotel
- Complimentaries - Liquid Soap
- Pampered Blue Ice Roll on -
- Chillwoods Deodorant
- Freshmint Toothpaste -
- Jordans Personal Care

Note: VPSG are currently negotiating a bar soap to join the above list.

## VPSG News - Sarah (Research)

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**The research** into the availability of vegan provisions in police custody suites continues. So far 6 constabularies have still not replied to the questionnaires.

The results are encouraging with most forces keen to co-operate with VPSG, but the various sections within different forces seem to vary in their attitude.

The way forward seems to be a regular police custody news sheet to include the items available for bulk order and what actually constitutes a vegan diet. Jo-Ann and I plan to compile the information and send it out with regular updates. Hopefully conditions will improve for all vegan prisoners held in custody. Thank you to Jo-Ann for all her patient assistance!

Sarah

## Prisoner and Court News

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### Recent Trials

Both Sylvia O'Brien and Heather Nicholson were given community service following their respective trials in May and June.

Both were found guilty of charges relating to the Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) campaign and both had faced a possible prison sentence.

### Upcoming Trials

**As we go to press**, three activists are on trial at Winchester Crown Court on SHAC related charges.

**Six activists** are due on trial at the end of September at Crown Court in London on SHAC related charges.

### Data Protection Charges Thrown Out Of Court

Three activists were found not guilty of the distribution of leaflets that were contrary to the Data Protection Act. Leaflets were handed out that asked for details about HLS, including phone numbers, e-mails and addresses. The case was heard in August, at Peterborough Crown Court.

# Writing to Prisoners by an ex-prisoner

## Make someone's day!

Letters can really make a difference to a prisoner's day, knowing that people are thinking about them, and supporting them. As an ex-prisoner I can say that I appreciated every letter that I got, whether it was just a couple of lines or an essay. One of the best parts of the day was when the mail came, and visits of course, they can lift your mood right up.

Even knowing this it is still hard to get past the first line of your letter, hard to know where to start and what to write. Below are some ideas if you want to get writing.

### What To Put

The first letter can be difficult if you don't know the prisoner (or even if you do). Here are a few ideas:

- If you don't know the prisoner, you could introduce yourself, what you do, what you're into, where you got their address from and so on.
- If you write about campaigning,

always bear in mind that all mail is read by prison staff. Don't admit to anything in your letter that you wouldn't admit to police.

● A lot of people seem to hold back from telling prisoners about the 'fun' stuff, because the prisoner is not in a position to go to gigs, parties etc..

It is highly unlikely that they will not want to read about this. Much more likely that they will want to hear that normal life is still going on and what is happening.

● Stay positive and remember the role of your letter is to lift their spirits.

● One of the best letters I got was in fact a card, where lots of people had written a short note. So if you are stuck for words why not send a joint card from your group/ with some friends?

● If you are still stuck for words, send a postcard with a couple lines on it. Often the important thing is not just the content, but that someone has bothered to write at all.

## Thanks

*Every donation from supporters is very welcome and much appreciated by VPSG to help continue our work. We would also like to thank supporters who subscribe via monthly standing order as this helps us to budget the running costs of the office which is very useful when campaigning for change within the Prison System.*

### Sending The Letter

Letters will often not get through if they do not have a return address contained somewhere within the letter.

A PO Box is usually acceptable but the odd prison will reject these as well, but they should return the letter to you so at least you will know. If the prison will accept them, always put an SAE or some stamps in with your letter and mark on the letter what you have enclosed.

### Sending In Other Things

If you want to send other things in it is best to check with the prison first, what they will allow in varies a great deal from prison to prison.

### Keep Writing

If the prisoner does not write back it may be because they did not receive your stamps, are busy (with work, education or gym), did not receive your letter or because of a number of other reasons. Don't give up on them, try writing again in a few weeks.

### Email Update List

If you would like to write to people as soon as they go to prison, join the email alert list. Email [vpsl2002@yahoo.com](mailto:vpsl2002@yahoo.com) with 'subscribe' in the subject line.

## National Vegan Festival

*We are having a stall so do come and visit us!*



**Sun 14 September**  
**10am-5pm**



**at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square**  
**London WC1 (nearest tube: Holborn)**

**Admission: Adults 1pound / under 16's free**

# Ex-Prisoner's Experience - Tony Humphries

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**I arrived at Rochester Prison in October 2000 and remained there until March 2002.** On arrival there were a few teething problems with regard non-leather footwear and diet.

However the staff, which I eventually found to include 1 Vegan, were extremely understanding and helpful allowing personal footwear to be sent in and open access to the kitchen staff in order to agree a suitable diet.

## **Clothing**

Because the prison is a B cat prison, no footwear of any type was allowed in without x-ray. However a governor's application, supported by wing staff who checked my Vegan status with VPSG, allowed non-leather footwear to be handed in or sent direct from vegetarian shoes. Non leather work gloves were also handed in.

## **Diet**

On my second week at Rochester, having had the usual errors at the hot plate, I was able to meet the kitchen manager Wayne.

Wayne and all the staff were keen to help arrange a suitable diet that was 100% Vegan. In particular, the staff were actually interested and photo-copied many recipe books I had with me.

The arrangement I agreed was to have 3.5 litres of fortified Soya milk a week. If only un-fortified was available then additional dried fruit, prunes and dates would be sent across.

Every evening I received a fresh salad, usually with a vegan item with access to the rice/pots etc. at the hotplate. Lunch was usually a baguette with a vegan filling consisting of home made hummus, mushroom pate or bought in scheese, or other sandwich fillings bought from goodness foods. Breakfast was meusli picked up on a weekly basis.

Every 3 months a whole food order was put in allowing a stock of vegan items such as biscuits/sandwich fillings/Soya mayo and 'cheatin' products. If a seasonal occurrence was nearing then the order would include sweets and chocolate so that the vegans received a similar extra to the other prisoners.

Soya yoghurts were made available at the weekends, and when a cooked breakfast was made for others(xmas/easter) rashers etc. were made for Vegans. Extra fruit was made available if no vegan sweet was on hand.

Eventually a faultless 3 week menu cycle was introduced including many kitchen cooked products such as soya bolognaise, baked garlic/mush rice/soya chilli/curry/salads/fritters/vegan suet puddings. The kitchens were always open and it was always evident that different oils were used for non-meat cooking.

## **Toiletries**

Toiletries at Rochester consisted only of the standard prison type. However once a month I was given permission to order through the canteen for a bought in order that AC Ward collected from an outside shop. This allowed me to buy anything from shaving products to tins of braised soya.

## **Overall**

Of all the prisons that I visited during my sentence, Rochester provided an environment as equal to other prisoners as I believe you could possibly get. The Halal/Kosher and Vegetarian diets were also well supported from reception into the prison to leaving. Inevitably some mistakes were made, such as the margarine changing without notice. But this was a genuine mistake and promptly rectified.

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## Prison News

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### **Prisons Introduce Breakfast Packs**

Breakfast Packs have recently been introduced in many prisons. They include 6 packs of cereal for one week as well as some other basics. Of the 6 cereals, 5 are vegan: frosted flakes, cocoa rice, cornflakes, branflakes and wheat biscuits. Crispy rice is not suitable

for vegans. The sugar, preserves, tea bags and margarine (Bebo) are vegan suitable, but the powdered milk is not.

If you are in prison you can either ask them to make you up a Breakfast Pack which only contains the vegan items, or failing that, take the pack and hand them back

the items which are not vegan -suitable.

### **Facing A Trial?**

For more information on what food is vegan in prison, see the website [www.vpsg.info](http://www.vpsg.info)



# Your Questions Answered

Below is a selection of questions that we have been asked recently. If you have a question send it to: **VPSG, PO Box 194, Enfield EN1 4YL**. Our advisory committee will do their best to answer it for you. Letters for inclusion in the Winter edition can also be sent to the above address.

## What is the difference between the VPSG & the ALF SG?

### The VPSG:

- Give moral and practical support where needed, to vegan animal rights prisoners detained either in police custody or within the prison service.

- Work to obtain vegan food and toiletries for prisoners.

- Highlight and work to improve the inadequate facilities for vegans in prison shops.

### The ALF SG:

- Provide financial support by sending a monthly sum to any prisoner in for an animal rights related 'crime' whilst detained within the prison service.

- Provide financial assistance to any relative or friend wishing to visit such prisoners.

Both groups have a list of supporters who are prepared to write to prisoners as soon as they are incarcerated. Letters and other contact with the outside world can make all the difference when in prison.

Both groups also put a newsletter out three or four times a year and have a website to keep supporters updated. The two groups complement each other very well in the care they provide.

The above is only a summary of the work that both groups undertake, for

more information contact them as below.

**VPSG:** contact details on front page. See also [www.vpsg.info](http://www.vpsg.info)

**ALF SG:** BCM 1160, London WC1N 3XX. Tel/fax 0870 138 5037, [info@alfsg.co.uk](mailto:info@alfsg.co.uk), [www.alfsg.org.uk](http://www.alfsg.org.uk)

## If I get a prison sentence, how do I let other people know what prison I am in? Will the VPSG be able to help with this?

The prison you go to will depend on who has got space at the time. Once you have been sentenced, someone in court can go to the holding cells and ask where you will be taken.

VPSG can find out whether you have been given a prison sentence, and the duration, by phoning the court. We can also get the prison address this way, but if there is someone in court, it is easier if they phone us, so that we can start liaising with the prison etc., as soon as the sentence is given.

You may wish to phone someone with your address once you are at

the prison, you should be given an opportunity to make a phone call at the time. This will also enable you to give out your prison number (you will be issued with a number when you are booked in). It is advisable to take money to court for a phonecard.

VPSG will put your prison details on the website and on our emergency email list straight away, if that is what you wish.

For more detailed information on going to prison write into VPSG for our Basic Information Pack, or download it from the website, [www.vpsg.org](http://www.vpsg.org). This pack covers the process from your arrest at the police station through to being in prison.

Also contact VPSG just before you may go in for up-to-date information on what prison food and toiletries are vegan. This does change from time to time.

## If I go to prison, what items will I be allowed? What about books and photos?

It varies greatly from prison to prison, though most if not all prisons will allow books and photos. Most will allow radios in, but they may not allow the batteries through. If these are not allowed through, you should be able to buy them in the prison shop. Some prisons will have an electricity socket in the cell where you can plug your radio in, but these are few and far between so a battery powered radio is a safer bet.

Extra clothes, books and other items can be brought in on visits as long as you haven't exceeded your allowance. You will often be required to fill in a request form before the visit, check this with the prison when you are there. Other items vary from prison to prison. Food, cigarettes and toiletries will not be allowed in unless approved by the prison.

## VPSG 24 hr Emergency Arrest Line

**07743 536 114**

If you are arrested just call this number and we will call you back.



# Vegan Prisoners Support Group

PO Box 194, Enfield, Middx EN1 4YL, United Kingdom.

Emergency Arrest Line: 07743 536 114 (we will call you back)

Office/fax: +44 (0)20 82 92 83 25 E-mail: [info@vpssg.org](mailto:info@vpssg.org) Web: [www.vpssg.org](http://www.vpssg.org)

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Please pay on the  /  /  and on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of every month until further notice, the sum of £  for the credit of VEGAN PRISONERS SUPPORT GROUP.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

As we are a non-profitmaking organisation with no paid staff, we run on a very tight budget. Supporting the VPSG is important to enable continued support for animal rights prisoners who have risked their freedom for the benefit of their non-human relatives. All donations are directly ploughed back into helping vegan animal rights prisoners of conscience.

A monthly donation of £1.00 (roughly 25 pence a week) will help ensure that we stay in existence. Your support in this way is most vital and gratefully received.

**Please check our website for regular updates: [www.vpssg.org](http://www.vpssg.org)**

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# A Prisoner of No Comparison

Written from Holloway Prison by Rae Schilling

**It is the morning of Christmas Eve....** The staff have arrived earlier than is usual today. They are hurriedly working through their chores....cutting corners to get finished....paying less attention to detail. There is a sense of urgency mixed with anticipation – a determination amongst them to get finished, to return to their homes. The atmosphere though is one of the false jollity. Almost palpable, it leaves a bitter taste in my mouth. All of this here is out of my control...but somehow transfers itself inwards.

I learnt early on to be wary of these people's moods....Of all facets of their behaviour. They are never to be trusted. Cruelty and evil stride boldly hand in hand. It is part of the daily routine here. The laughter is not of a genuine nature. Their New-found spirit of geniality only serves to confuse and alienate me further. Any change, any alteration in their mood is unnerving. It reinforces my deep distrust of them, my fear.

Conversation settles on a central theme....where it will be spent... who they will share their time with. I should feel less intimidated today – for my presence is hardly acknowledged – but I do not. They are here. That is enough. My meal is administrated today. Their tasks are almost completed. The floor is given a token sweep. Then they leave. The security guards are the only staff who remain on site. They will not venture in. We are alone once more....

An overwhelming sense of relief washes over me – releasing me from my fear of persecution and torture, for a while. I begin to relax. Others, like myself, shift their positions... moving a little to ease the pain of confinement.... stretching tight and weary bodies.

A gentle chattering noise can be heard – a comforting reminder of times gone – in a language half forgotten. Someone is playing with the drinking water....others begin to eat. These sounds – so natural to us – break the monotony of the incessant clicking of the strip lighting and the continuous humming and whirring from heaters and extractor fans.

I thought of escape today. It would have been a good time to try – with staff not as vigilant as is normal. A female made a bid for freedom a few days. She was caught before she reached the first door and beaten severely. Her screams still pervade my thoughts. Everything though, has to be risked in order to be free. Another female, who has been here far longer than I, has lost her mind. She passes her days in a sea of torment confusion – as if, by her repetitive movements she can somehow evade the remorseless tide which slaps heavily against her. Her swaying movements are deliberate – although no longer controlled by any conscious reasoning – and are only broken long enough for her to take her food. Then she begins again in earnest....weaving....rocking.....swaying.

The female next to me sits very quietly – save for her desperate attempts to find some comfort to alleviate her pain. She was wrenched from her cage a while back. This was performed with such brutality that her shoulder was broken. She used to tap gently to me with her knuckles. Those days have now gone. Her injury was not documented... nor any treatment given. The only record is a note attached to her cage door: DANGEROUS DO NOT HANDLE ALONE. No one outside of this place will ever know of her

suffering...nor of any of the abuse that we are subjected to.

I heard the staff whispering amongst themselves the other day. One of them had 'messed up' on the dosing and the wrong drugs were given. I know who got that dose. I recognised her body when she was carried through on the way to the incinerator. In death, as in life, she was handled like garbage – her wasted and fragile frame, covered only by a blue plastic sheet, ready to be discarded. She was thrown away... rubbished... of no further use or consequence. Another stolen life disposed of in secrecy and silence... another statistic.

The caretaker, whose task it is to dispose with waste... with us... likes to torment the young females here. His daily routine is always strictly adhered to. He strolls though the unit while deciding who appears to be the easiest target. He then takes a sweet wrapper from his pocket and screws it tightly in his dirty hand. The noise is interesting and attracts those who have not yet been drained of their inherent inquisitive nature. He waits to see who will play. The rustling noise is a temptation. He knows this well. Most have long become wise to his sick game, but he is unrelenting in his determination to find a victim. A youngster, with little understanding of life here, reached tentatively to take his offering. Last time... She was rewarded with a deep burn from his lighted cigarette which he stubbed hard into her arm. I retched in horror at her anguish and cries of pain. A cocktail of singed hair and burned flesh hung in the air – a stark reminder to trust no one here.

My thoughts turn once more to my beloved daughter. She was

caught along with me many months ago. Had I known the future then... for us... for her... I would surely have killed myself. For to have done so, would have been an act of the greatest mercy borne out of love and compassion – a final gift from me. She used to call for me... pleading for me to respond – her cries of desperation echoing along the empty corridors. I could not answer... for to have done so would have given her hope. Of that, there is none. It has been a while since I last heard her voice. Maybe she has been moved elsewhere? Perhaps she is already...

Three Home Office officials visited a while back. Inspections of this kind are classed as “of a highly sensitive nature” – not to be announced in advance. This visit, as with all past inspections, was well advertised. Its failure to expose the truth will not be. The report that will be compiled on their return to their government buildings will not affect my welfare, nor will it improve any of the conditions. It is there to appease those who raise concerns about the need for our incarceration here. A must for the genocide to continue unabated... unhindered.

Recommendations, improvements, they have no place here. They are merely ideals to which no one wishes to aspire. The world must not know the truth... the real reason for our detention. We must remain hidden at all costs, to protect the greatest lie of all time. We are all lost forever in a cesspit of pulsating greed – pressing and churning products in a hidden market of corruption and deceit – passing silently through on a journey filled with confusion, fear and pain. The destination meets, as always, with our ruthless destruction. There is only one constant here... one certainty. We will all die. Not one of us will survive. We only wait and wonder not if, but when our turn will come. I pray that they will hasten that day...

A primate in a vivisection laboratory... anywhere.

The account that you have read is seen through the eyes of a female monkey, it is a fact! The truth can not be disputed, for I like so many others have been inside a vivisection laboratory and witnessed the horrors therein. It is our duty then, to be the voice of the voiceless; to tell ‘their’ story. We can do nothing for the millions who have al-

ready succumbed to the horrors, but we can make a difference for all those who remain.

No animal in a laboratory is afforded a name, that would be foolhardy, the vivisectionists know this well. It would bestow upon all non-human animals an identity, an acknowledgement of their importance, their worth. This would lead to a natural progression whereby all sentient beings would find their ‘own place’ in society and at last have ‘animal rights’. No questions need to be asked as to why the proposed ‘Freedom Of Information Act’ is so vehemently opposed by the Vivisection Industry. Were it to become law, all animal experiments would be seen for what they are: Evil, futile and repetitive... Anarchy would ensue!

For James who died in Huntingdon Life Sciences, Princeton, New Jersey.

...Lest we forget.

...Until all are free.

Stay strong!

Rae.

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Bank's Sort Code \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_ Your Account Number \_\_\_\_\_

Please pay on the \_\_\_\_\_ 20\_\_\_\_, and on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of every month until further notice,

The sum of £\_\_\_\_\_ for the credit of VEGAN PRISONERS SUPPORTERS GROUP.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



# Vegan Prisoners Support Group

Newsletter, February 2004

## Prisoner Letters - Dave Blenkinsop

### Well earned rest or daily tedium?



**I find it frustrating** when I read so many articles which describe prison as a time to catch up with reading and to take stock.

Perhaps this may be so for some but when you wake up each morning and you know exactly what is in store it all becomes very very tedious. There is nothing glamorous about being in prison, I must endure the same daily problems as everybody else. Let us not forget the true nature of punishment is not punitive, but is to separate from normality, from the ones you love and the life you lead.

My contact with that world of yours - for it is not my world - is only through your letters and visits. That world is changed and I struggle to relate to it owing to the separation and it is the world that I currently occupy that defines me. This world is characterised by monotony, trivia and a struggle to rise above it. When the prevailing preference is to discuss mind-numbing trivia you must fight to keep it in perspective. Of course you make the most of

the situation. I have engrossed myself in education for I can not justify working for the system that confines me.

Over the last two years I have helped many to read and write. The levels of literacy were a real shock for me: the average reading age is that of a twelve year old and a 60% dyslexia rate. I know how much pleasure reading has given me and it is only right that I should assist others to share that pleasure.

Some people may comment that it shows the same compassion that brought me here, but not so. I am no martyr, no saint, for those that know me know how stubborn and obnoxious I am. To see others less fortunate achieve gives me the pleasure that drives me. If we can't help our fellow man then can we really be effective in helping animals?

I am fortunate in receiving guidance from an outstanding bunch of teachers. Their diligence and sincerity has inspired me to push myself with my own education. Who would have thought I'd become a prolific short story writer and have even tinkered with poetry? Not the same person surely who could only muster up four letter words aimed at the Old Surrey and Burstow?

I have achieved in my first two and a half years: I must have for I adjusted completely in to this society. As I said earlier the true punishment is in the separation. Friendships in here are superficial and it is this that perturbs me the most. Such friendships are based

Continued on page 4

### In this issue:

- Letters from prisoners
- VPSG News
- Prison and Court News
- Letting us know if you go to jail
- Letters
- Setting up a VPSG abroad

## Prison News

**On 5 January**, Kerry Whitburn was sentenced to two months imprisonment after pleading guilty to burglary with intent.

After spending a short time in HMP Nottingham, followed by HMP North Sea Camp, he was released on 30 January.

*Letter from Kerry on page 3.*

**Folkestone 7 update. See back page.**

## Current Prisoners

**Dave Blenkinsop** (EM7899), HMP Bullingdon, Patrick Haugh Road, Arncott, Bicester, Oxfordshire OX6 0PZ.

Serving ten years in all; three years for the attack on HLS boss Brian Cass, 18 months for liberating 600 guinea pigs at Newchurch, and 5½ years for planting incendiary devices under abattoir lorries and HLS staff cars. All sentences to run consecutively.

## Contact VPSG

### Postal Address:

PO Box 194, Enfield, Middx EN1 4YL, United Kingdom.

### Emergency Arrest Line:

07743 536 114 (we will call you back)

**Office/fax:** +44 (0)20 8292 8325

**E-mail:** [info@vpsg.org](mailto:info@vpsg.org)

**Web:** [www.vpsg.org](http://www.vpsg.org)

Disclaimer: The views in the VPSG newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor. Responsibility can not be taken for the accuracy of statements made by contributors or the verification of material sent to VPSG for inclusion in the Newsletter.

# Editorial

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## One step forward, more progress needed

### One step forward...

#### Catering:

VPSG have been invited to make a presentation to Catering Managers of over 50 prisons in February; Veggies will be there so that they can try out their famous burgers, which many vegans enjoy at festivals etc. This taste of Veggies food will hopefully encourage more prisons to want this product added to their National Contract.

So far over 30 prisons have participated in the burger mix trials and they all responded well on our feedback sheets. They felt that the product was versatile and much better than other similar products available to them.

However, adding any new item onto the prison contracts isn't quite as simple as we would wish, there are all sorts of drawbacks and hurdles we need to overcome first.

At this same presentation three new

vegan items are being sampled by the Catering Managers: Quinova Mince, Wicken Fenn Nuggets and Major Sauces. More about how we get on in the next newsletter.

### ...more progress needed

#### Prison Shops/Hygiene Products:

Much work has been done here on these issues since last January when we were invited to a meeting at Prison Service – Corby. At this meeting we were given all sorts of assurances that more vegan items would be available through prison shops and that a vegan bar soap and vegan washing powder would be provided.

Surprise, surprise, there hasn't been any major improvements as yet. This is disappointing as Greta [at their request] spent hours and hours over several months researching suitable vegan items for inclusion on Canteen Sheets, e-mail after e-mail was responded to, until finally we were informed that some of our recommendations would be accepted by 1<sup>st</sup> November 2003.

Just as well we didn't hold our breath as we have just discovered that all the people we were working with in their department in Corby have been transferred to different departments!! In addition they have no knowledge what the current position is on any decision.

#### Our Plans:

We are setting up a team of volunteers to concentrate on these two issues. The first item on our agenda is to prepare a comprehensive report and forward it to the new Director General of the Prison Service regarding our concerns of the broken promises.

#### Your Help Would Be Valuable:

If any supporters wish to help by writing to their M.P. on these issues just drop us a line and we'll send you some pointers of what to include in your letters. It's worked before and together we can make it work again. We look forward to receiving your letters.

Jo-Ann

## VPSG News - Greta

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**The first time** I offered support to an animal rights prisoner was to write a line from a song on a postcard and pop it in the post. I remember the awkward feeling of writing to someone who I didn't know but what I did know was that I wanted to offer my support.

A good few years later and here I am writing a piece for the VPSG newsletter on what it involves to be a case worker for a vegan who has been incarcerated.

There are a number of levels within the role. The practical level involves ensuring that the person for whom you are case worker is being offered vegan meals that provide all of their nutritional requirements and that basic hygiene products are available.

Outside of this there is often

research to be done on the vegan suitability of things on offer, including items that may appear in the prison shop.

In some prisons the VPSG have been able to visit the kitchen and speak with kitchen staff about vegan diets and the particular needs and problems faced by the person we are representing.

It is hoped that sometime in the future when our efforts have ensured that vegans are better provided for within the system that the role of case worker will be down to a few phone calls to ensure things are in place. In order for this to happen, the VPSG has to continue to work tirelessly in liaison with the Prison Service in order to implement vegan provisions as a right.

The situation with both kitchens and

the prison shop varies from one institution to the next. In allocating case workers, the individual workers are able to focus fully on trying to forge links with kitchen staff to try to ensure that products which are suitable for vegans are on the prison shop list.

While working as a case worker one can often be filled with frustrations: frustration that compassionate people are locked away for ultimately working and striving towards a wish that all beings are free from suffering. To add insult to this, whilst incarcerated they are often not provided the bare essentials let alone the 'privileges' that other prisoners are entitled to and that is why our work within the Prison System continues.

Greta Ling

# Prison News - Kerry Whitburn

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## Letter From Kerry

Regardless of people's misconceptions, prisons are not holiday camps. Often the prison itself is not the problem, but you can feel isolated away from those that you care for - especially your animals.

Suddenly you find yourself amongst people with whom you have nothing in common and realise why it is so important to support prisoners through letters, so they can maintain contact with like minded and compassionate people.

It is equally important to support organisations such as the VPSG for their invaluable and tireless work and effort.

Love and Respect,  
Kerry.

## VPSG News - Sarah

The work with the police forces continues with research for new suppliers of vegan toiletries and clothing being constantly updated. It is hoped we can send out a comprehensive list to all constabularies in the near future and can then work on the response we get.

From Nottingham Evening Post website 07 January 2004

### JAIL FOR BID TO FREE MONKEYS

by Katharine Barney

An Animal rights activist has been jailed for two months after trying to free two marmoset monkeys he saw on television.

Kerry Whitburn, 34, broke into The Fish Specialist, in Mansfield Road, Woodthorpe, last year.

Nottingham magistrates heard how he saw the shop on a TV documentary and noticed the monkeys in cages which he thought too small.

Alison Quinn, prosecuting, said that last June Whitburn taped a black bin liner to a door panel at the front of the shop then smashed it with a crow bar.

Along with the crow bar, he also had two sacks in which he intended to transport the monkeys to an animal sanctuary...

Whitburn, of Edgbaston,

Birmingham, was arrested and charged after blood was found on the inner blind of the door which matched his.

Last month he admitted burglary with intent.

Gavin Haigh, defending, said: "His beliefs were such that, while watching television, he decided that the monkeys were not being kept in ways they should have been.

"He tried to buy the monkeys but was refused. So great were his feelings that he felt he had no choice but to save them.

"He had altruistic motives for the burglary and that makes it somewhat unusual."

Whitburn has had previous convictions for public order offences in pursuit of his beliefs.

## Court News - Lynn

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I attended the Pesticide conference in Brighton last year and to cut a long story short ended up barricaded in the HLS hospitality suite at the Brighton Metropole hotel with some beer. I was then arrested for burglary when the police finally managed to get in as they were convinced that I had taken advantage of the situation!

Eventually I was supposed to answer police bail at Brighton on a day which I was due help with a demo outside Expensive, a fur shop now closed, on Oxford St.

After much discussion with the officer in the case it was mutually agreed that I should answer bail

the following week. I attended the demo and within 5 minutes was arrested for a section 14 and subsequently remanded in custody spending 3 days in two London police stations before being transferred to Brighton magistrates who gave me bail.

Unfortunately Premier security staff responsible for custody at the magistrates were rather unsavoury, rude, and keen on threats and rough handling so they got some penalty points from the prison service after I complained.

Added to that, they had kept me in custody illegally for 3 days on the grounds that the Brighton police were embarrassed, because they

changed the date of bail at my request, and I got arrested on another demo. It would seem that I have 2 good cases to prosecute both police and Premier.

This farce ended with a jury trial at which I was found guilty of stealing 1 bottle of beer and given a 3 year conditional discharge with absolutely no costs.

One of their witnesses was even flown back from Nice to testify against me and Peter Owen, an HLS manager, had to spend the whole day away from his little friends at the concentration camp. There has also been lots of local press coverage to embarrass them all a bit more.

# Why it's important to let us know before you land on 'GO TO JAIL'

**The sooner you let** the Vegan Prisoner Support Group know when you are due in court for what may turn out to be a custodial sentence, the sooner the VPSG will be able to get to work on sorting out your vegan provisions.

After an arrest and before a trial we know that people have a head full of worries, and contacting the VPSG is likely to be the last thing on your mind, but.....

When VPSG know what court a person will be appearing in, our first step will be to contact the court to confirm what courier company transports people from court to prison. Once we have managed to obtain this information we can go on to find out what prison a person is likely to be taken to.

At this stage we will try to assess what vegan provisions are in place at the likely institution and start attempting to put in place missing essential items e.g. shampoo,

soap, toothpaste.

The VPSG has a good working relation with many prison kitchens, so in some cases will only need to make a call to make them aware that a vegan may be on the way and refresh their minds, if needed, on the do's and don'ts. In other cases more input and guidance may be needed.

On the day of the hearing the VPSG will always try to ensure a volunteer is available on the phones all day ready to deal with the outcome should a person be told "Go to jail".

In this situation the volunteer can then immediately make contact with the courier service to gain confirmation on where the person has been taken. With this information the prison will be called to ensure they will get a vegan meal and where possible, toiletries on arrival.

In the instance that her majesty's pleasure do not provide vegan

washing products, the VPSG will arrange to have a pack sent in. This can be a lengthy process as all sorts of permission must be gained in order to get the go-ahead. When the VPSG knows ahead of trial and have been able to carry out prior research, we are able to get the needed clearance and in some cases will send a pack ahead of conviction.

The VPSG also provides support for the rights of vegans whilst they are detained at a police station.

For more information look at our website on [www.vpsg.org](http://www.vpsg.org) or contact us at the address on the front page.



## Court News

**All charges** at a SHAC-related trial at Winchester Crown Court last August were dismissed by the judge. Three activists and one disenchanted ex-employee of Eli Lilly faced charges of conspiracy to cause a public nuisance.

**At another** SHAC-related trial last September, six activists faced charges of criminal damage and violent disorder after a revolving door was smashed at a Marsh building. Charges were dismissed against four defendants, after two of the defendants pleaded guilty to criminal damage. They received community service.

## Obituary

Sheila Sheppard one of our oldest supporters sadly passed away recently. Both Sheila and her husband have been staunch supporters since our early days when there was little financial support for our work.

Sheila was committed to the animal rights cause and will be sadly missed.

## Prisoner Letters - Dave Blenkinsop (continued from front page)

on need and self-gain, you learn to enjoy your own company for you are only answerable to yourself.

Apart from the Education Department I'm afraid I have no fond words to express about this place. They cram so many into such confined spaces, keep you banged up as much as is permissible and are unable to see the suffering that goes on every day.

The food is hideous. The VPSG do their very best to change this but the system is inflexible. The evening meals are a variation on minutely diced vegetables in a runny red sauce. It lacks imagination or care, nutrition or taste. It's what I've come to expect of prison food but that is not to

undervalue the essential work of the VPSG for improvements have been made and they do their very best against all the odds.

Please forgive me for not replying to all your letters. I may have the time but not the inspiration to enact a reply. The few that I do write to have been with me from the beginning and I need this in-depth sustenance to contend with the trivia that surrounds me. In theory I could be half way through. It all depends on the kindly Parole Board. The longest they can keep me is for another four years. Worse things happen at sea!

Regards to all, keep up the good work,

Dave x



# Letters

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Hi everyone,

Just to keep you up to date with the farce that is our judicial system re my sentencing in court today. Thanks again for all your continued support.

Today I was sentenced for the crime of getting out my car and walking a few yards towards a golf club house in Burton, used of course by John Hall (notorious guinea pig breeder) What's that I hear you say? What was the crime?? Well according to Inspector Bird of Staffs Police I was shouting very loud disrupting the golf tournament taking place and when asked to leave by him, I swore & pushed past him etc etc. A complete pack of lies!! So the charges were failing to leave land and aggravated trespass.

Magistrates today ordered that I serve a Community Rehabilitation

Order for a period of 18 months which basically means regularly seeing my probation officer and a program of courses over that time. All aimed at moulding/brainwashing me into the good citizen that they want me to be! On top of that I also have to pay £380 court costs! It's very expensive getting 12 police witnesses into court, 3 day trial etc etc!!

The other person being sentenced today got 100 hours community service and £380 costs, for the same offences. We will both be appealing this ridiculous conviction in due course.

Oh and then there's the little matter of the Anti Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) that the state/police so desperately need to enforce against me to protect the rest of society!! Well this is where it gets even

more farcical. My last appearance for sentencing, 10 days ago, was cancelled due to there not being enough time to deal with the ASBO. Well, after being sentenced today, once again there was not enough time for the ASBO to be heard in full. So once again, it's been adjourned till the 11 February!! But this time of course I've been sentenced and my bail condition is no longer in force. So there is absolutely nothing to stop me returning to Newchurch Farm, the place they so desperately need to keep me away from!!

That's all for now folks. Extra special thanks to the people who gave me glowing references/statements and to those who came to court today (you know who you are).

See you soon

Kevin xx

## Setting Up A VPSG Abroad

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We are often being approached by different countries asking for information on how to set up a VPSG abroad. Although the procedures to campaign for change will be different from country to country the following are the basic requirements:

A computer, a designated telephone line with an answering machine facility and a fax machine.

Our experience has shown that prison officials might be reluctant to contact a mobile possibly due to the high cost of the call or possibly as they might not expect any official organisation to only be using mobile numbers.

Next, an official address or p.o.box and either a volunteer or volunteers to conduct the day to day work and to take the calls.

Volunteers used to dealing with officials and general office work as well as general filing and record keeping would be an advantage. However, if you do not have this experience do not let it deter you! It is surprising how quickly you can pick it up.

An added bonus would be to have a volunteer with a flair for conducting research as lots is needed on a

regular basis and can be very time consuming.

Once the above is up and running, although all the work can be done by volunteers, regular funds need to be found to pay for the running costs of the work. One of the highest costs is the telephone bill which is constantly in use to conduct research, respond to enquiries and to contact the different prison departments. All such calls need to be done mostly at peak times, and additional funds are required for other necessary items, such as stationery, stamps, and any other costs needed to run a successful VPSG.

Contact other A/R groups about your new support group, so that they are ready to contact you if required.

Another asset - although not essential - is a web site for supporters. This needs to be launched and maintained on a regular basis by another volunteer.

We have found our second web site,

[www.vpsg.info](http://www.vpsg.info), very useful to refer prison/police staff to for reference. On it we have installed invaluable information which has improved our progress regarding the care of our prisoners.

Our second web site [www.vpsg.info](http://www.vpsg.info) could be used as a reference as it contains invaluable nutritional information for the care of vegans and also menu suggestions as well as recipes, prison news sheets etc.

The rest is up to the amount of time and effort volunteers have to devote to campaigning/making recommendations/meetings etc. which will speed up any progress for any vegan animal rights campaigner finding those gates closing

behind them.

●Where possible, VPSG volunteers are willing to offer help and advice to anyone who wants to start up a vegan prisoners support group. Please do drop us a line to the address on the front page.

**The following are the basic requirements: A computer, a designated telephone line with an answering machine facility and a fax machine.**

# Court News - Folkestone 7

**Back in October 2002** a series of raids took place involving the joint forces of the National Crime Unit, Special Branch and even the Anti-Terrorist Squad. The raids resulted in five activists being remanded for taking part in demonstrations at the homes of senior directors of Marsh UK, then providing insurance cover for Huntingdon Life Sciences.

After a month on remand all were released after a QC made an appeal to the Courts of Justice, albeit on severe bail conditions.

A further month later and the CPS throw out all the charges against the activists.

Around March 2003 a series of summonses were issued against the original five and two others who had subsequently been arrested and charged.

Finally in December 2003 at a hearing at Folkestone magistrates court, three activists pleaded guilty to one section 4a, three other activists were found guilty on two accounts of section 4a (one in her

absence) and one activist had his charges dropped.

The 6 remaining activists were sentenced on 4 February 2004. Three received community service, two received a community rehabilitation order, and one received probation. Costs were also given to the three activists who did not put in a guilty plea.

## Vegan Prisoners Support Group

PO Box 194, Enfield, Middx EN1 4YL, United Kingdom. ☎/fax: +44 (0)20 82 92 83 25

E-mail: [info@vpbg.org](mailto:info@vpbg.org) Web: [www.vpbg.org](http://www.vpbg.org)

### STANDING ORDER FORM

PLEASE NOTE: Once you have completed the following standing order form, please return to VPBG, not your bank

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

Your Address \_\_\_\_\_

To The Manager

Name of Bank \_\_\_\_\_

Branch \_\_\_\_\_

Bank's Address \_\_\_\_\_

Bank's Sort Code   -   -   Bank Account Number \_\_\_\_\_

Please pay on the  /  /  and on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of every month until further notice, the sum of

£  for the credit of VEGAN PRISONERS SUPPORT GROUP.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

As we are a non-profitmaking organisation with no paid staff, we run on a very tight budget. Supporting the VPBG is important to enable continued support for animal rights prisoners who have risked their freedom for the benefit of their non-human relatives. All donations re directly ploughed back into helping vegan animal rights prisoners of conscience.

A monthly donation of £1.00 (roughly 25 pence a week) will help ensure that we stay in existence. Your support in this way is most vital and gratefully received.

Please check our revamped website for regular updates: [www.vpbg.org](http://www.vpbg.org)

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# Vegan Prisoners Support Group

Newsletter, June 2004

## Prisoner Letters - Paul le Boutillier

**Congratulations** to the Vegan Prisoners Support Group on their 10th anniversary. Also a huge thank you for all the tremendous work that Jo-Ann and the whole team have done and continue to do to make life easier and more bearable and ensure our vegan ethics are recognised in UK prisons.

It is now 3 months since I came into prison and so far the time has passed quickly. In the months prior to being sentenced I decided that I was going to adopt the 'Jeffrey Archer' attitude and view imprisonment as a 'Life enhancing Experience! Adopting this mind set seems to be working well for me; I look for all the positive aspects, not the negatives. When control of our life is taken from you, so are your responsibilities which in a strange



way is quite liberating, physically and mentally.

I have been fortunate that since arrival at HMP Hull I have received vegan meals and additional vegan food packs. The standard of the meals has been very variable, some have been poor, particularly those involving the use of 'vege mince' type products, but this may be bias on my part as I do not like vegan foods that imitate the taste or texture of foods derived from murdered animals. However, some of the meals have been excellent, particularly taking into consideration the prison budget and resource limitations and that there are over 1,000 inmates and I am the only vegan!

*continued on page 11*

### In this issue:

- Letters from prisoners
- Letters from ex-prisoners
- VPSG news
- VPSG 10 year poem

## 10 Years of VPSG

**The VPSG** has now been in existence for ten years and in this issue we not only hear from our current prisoners, but look back over the last ten years.

Who better to hear from than some of the animal rights people who have been imprisoned over the years as well as some of the volunteers who keep the wheels of the VPSG turning?

Let's hope there will be no need for us to be in existence for another 10 years, but as long as people are prepared to give their freedom for their beliefs we will be there to try to help!

## Prisoner Letters - Paul Holliday

**Dear VPSG,**

It was great that the VPSG Easter pack was allowed in, thanks.

I would really like to thank you and your supporters for your great support; when I was in prison 5 years ago for actions against Hellgrove Farm we received lots of support, but now the



support is overwhelming and much more positive. People should be positive.

Obviously, I wasn't happy about getting 18 months for making polite phone calls, but with tagging I could be out in July, fingers crossed. Both Paul and I are both appealing against our sentences and I haven't a clue how

long that takes.

Keep up the good work and again, thanks for all your support.

**Love and Unity Paul**

## New Prisoners

**On 26 February** Paul le Boutillier and Paul Holliday were sentenced to 5 years and 18 months respectively. This was in relation to making phone calls in connection with animal rights campaigns including Covance.

**On 29 April** Kerry Whitburn was sentenced to 4 months in connection with actions against Newchurch farm.

Letters are welcome, their full addresses are on the enclosed prisoner list insert. See the website, [www.vpsg.org](http://www.vpsg.org) for the latest prisoner list.

## Contact VPSG

**Postal Address:**

PO Box 194, Enfield, Middx EN1 4YL,  
United Kingdom.

**Office/fax:** +44 (0)20 8292 8325

**E-mail:** [info@vpsg.org](mailto:info@vpsg.org)

**Web:** [www.vpsg.org](http://www.vpsg.org)

Disclaimer: The views in the VPSG newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor. Responsibility can not be taken for the accuracy of statements made by contributors of the verification of material sent to VPSG for inclusion in the Newsletter.

# Editorial

**Some of you may remember when I was a prisoner myself a few years ago**, during which time I received tremendous support from the VPSG. It was during these years that I first began to work with the group in order to help improve its standing within the prison system by contributing my own experiences as a prisoner to the work already being done. We felt that by combining our efforts we would ensure more provisions for Vegan prisoners.

At the time we had images of barbed wire and animal abuse that regularly featured in newsletters and correspondence. It was at this point that we realised, both in and out of prison, that the image of a campaigning group, with a dual agenda was alienating some people within the prison system. This meant they were not always engaging the VPSG as a serious outside agency who were committed to improving the lives of a minority group within their system.

The progress that had been made at this point was tremendous, and to build on this, it was decided to refocus the group to concentrate on prisoner support and to also intro-

duce a more structured approach that would actually give support and assistance to the Home Office and prison staff themselves.

The work that has since been carried out by VPSG volunteers has been extremely intense and time-consuming. Information packs are available for kitchen staff and reception areas. A dedicated website will provide the authorities with up-to-date information with regard to all aspects surrounding the care of Vegan prisoners, and regular meetings and even workshops are being planned with prison staff up and down the country. Obviously the level of direct prisoner support has also continued and is more structured in order to more evenly distribute a work load that is continually fluctuating and ensure that prisoners get the quick response they need when problems occur. There are now personal caseworkers who take responsibility for certain prisoners.

Since leaving prison in 2002, I have continued to work with the VPSG, albeit in a very limited capacity as an ex-prisoner advisor. Now that I

have completed the parole process, I intend to work more closely with an organisation that has been tireless



in its efforts, and hope that I can contribute towards the on going improvements that help our prisoners.

I am aware there are still a few steps that get taken backwards, particularly with the extremely quick turnover of prison staff at all levels, and the process has always and will always require a constant and vigilant approach, the overall effect being that real improvements and a sense of support is felt by those for whom we care.

**Tony Humphries**

## VPSG News - Jo-Ann Brown

**You may notice** that I am not writing the usual editorial, but I felt it might be more interesting for supporters to hear in turn from other VPSG volunteers. So in future each newsletter editorial will be written by a different volunteer. As Tony Humphries has just completed his parole and is now able to join our team it was felt it would be perfect for him to write the editorial for our anniversary edition.



I have therefore decided to write an article taking some of our supporters down memory lane.

I was actually amazed to learn that 10 years have passed since I first established VPSG.

These years have been so busy and have just flown by. I remember how it all started and looking through our records am amazed at how few regulations were in place when I embarked on attempting to help VPSG's first

prisoners Angie Hamp and Keith Mann.

However, none of this would have happened if I hadn't met Angie Hamp through John Curtin and 'Spike'. Spike was John Curtin's little brown staffy and everyone who knew Spike will remember how she so easily won the hearts of everyone she met; mine included. She used to go everywhere John could take her, until of course he was sent to prison. I was honoured to be asked to have her as my house guest while he was serving his sentence and as it turned out after his release as she was ready to retire from John's active life.

Thank you John for those years of

*continued on page 10*

# Prisoner Letters - Dave Blenkinsop

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## From Bullingdon to Rye Hill; from dungeon to delirium

I've finally got the move I wanted, it only took 21/2 years to get it! And what a delight it is to write to you from a much more civilised establishment. Bullingdon was taking its toll on me, not least of which was the continuous succession of pad mates that couldn't recognise a bar of soap if they'd wanted to. I won't forget the 'pad mate' that never emerged from his bed and another who phlegmed in the sink and had teeth like a row of condemned houses.

That's all in the past now, it's time to move on in a more progressive atmosphere. Everything is vastly superior; I'm still in a 2-man cell and will be for the next two months and then the delights of singledom. The clientele is much more mature and my sentence is small-fry compared

to the many lifers that I encounter. I couldn't be happier, well I could - but it's not a happiness I am likely to see for another 3 years! In the whole of context of prison life it doesn't get better than this. It may be the novelty value, but I think I'm gonna like it here.

As you know, I was relegated back to 'B' Cat status due to incompetence by Bullingdon and I expect to be here until I get my 'C' Cat back. I've done the worst part, 3 years on the worst the system has to offer and now it's a new start with perhaps 3 years left. All your letters have helped and as always, I apologise for not replying, my priorities must be with my nearest and dearest. Perhaps when I get a single cell I can reply to more, I know you may not think so but I do my best. Do not forget that it is just as hard for my partner as it is for

me. But relationships can flourish although the pattern is that many fail through forced separation. If nothing else it teaches you never to take things for granted, to appreciate the small things and to avoid the trivial.

I wasn't one to sit around beforehand and I'll be even more intense when I get out, but in a strictly lawful manner of course.

There is a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel, but they have the power to make the tunnel longer should they wish. Parole could be as close as 2 years away, but it's not wise to raise one's expectations. Let's just say that we're getting there and leave it at that.

Kind regards to everyone who cares, who knows the difference between right and wrong and has the conscience to do something about it.

**Dave**

# Prisoner Letters - Kerry Whitburn

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**I arrived here** about 3:30pm on April 30th and underwent the usual mundane processing - being issued with prison clothes; prison number; fingerprints/photo being taken; question after question (some being asked three or four times by different officers!)

I was taken to B wing at 6pm and placed on the first night centre. These cells have a T.V. and kettle in them, and we were told that due to the weekend/bank holiday - we'd be in there till Tuesday. However after seeing the doctor and allocation officers on Saturday morning, we were moved to the main landing - No T.V. or kettle! Talk about sweets from a baby!

Luckily, I was placed with a guy in his 40's, so no gobby youth whose only conversation is about who he's ripped off / hurt; how many cars he's nicked; how much he makes selling drugs etc. I know that may sound cynical, self-righteous or judgemental, but believe me - I AM speaking

from previous experience! Many youngsters I've encountered in various prisons it appears really do subconsciously believe they are distant relatives of Al Capone or Sweeney Todd!

Well after a week of relatively decent conversation and intense reading, I was once again moved. I'm now on D wing, which also has T.V / kettle in the cell. My cellmate seems ok, though he is of his own admission a T.V addict, so no room for much conversation.

And here I am. Not sure when I'll be moving or where to, but thanks to the VPSG for being on the ball (AGAIN). I at least have the comfort of proper vegan food - the catering manager spoke to me on the second day and he remembered me from my previous sentence! I had to wait a few days for my vegan toiletries - a mix up in reception apparently! - But I was able to shower, shave and wash with prison issue shampoo. Plays havoc on the



skin though, sends it really dry. OoooH! Ha-Ha. At least the toothpaste (prison issue) is also vegan.

My gratitude and appreciation to EVERYONE who has written to me and offered their excellent support. Sorry I've not been able to reply to everyone, due to this prison's ridiculous policy of no stationery being sent in.

Well I'll be off now, thanks so much for everything,

**Love and Liberation, Kerry xxxx**



## Ex-prisoner letters - Angie Hamp



**I first met Jo-Ann 18 years ago** when she was caring for Spike [an adorable staffy] when a mutual friend was inside for the Duke of Beaufort grave digging. We hit it off immediately and have stayed close

friends ever since.

Ten years ago Keith Mann and myself found ourselves being arrested whilst working at an animal sanctuary and Jo-Ann came to our aid making sure our needs were being met and followed me up and down the country from prison to prison organising vegan meals and food goodies in the canteen for us to purchase. She also ensured that mail order toiletries were allowed in; thus came the birth of the VPSG.

About 18 months into my sentence I found myself nicked for refusing to deliver a 'meat' sandwich to screws,

six months later my parole was refused mainly on those grounds and I ended doing an extra eight months.

Jo-Ann has now got guidelines in place so try to ensure that this never happens again to a fellow vegan.

She was always there for me at the end of the phone, a prison visit and homeleave. Her support helped me get through my sentence knowing that there was help whenever I needed it.

Thank you Jo-Ann.

**Angie Hamp**

## Ex-prisoner letters - Keith Mann

**Incredible as it seems to me now I sit and think about it I've been out of prison for 5 years** yet am still bumping into folk for the first time who wrote to me back then and have wanted to say hello. As welcome as all those letters were back then it is much preferable to chat in person.

What surprises me most is not so much that time passes so quick because thinking about it again I've done an awful lot in that time, but more that I

haven't ended up back inside. It isn't for lack of effort on my part or the police who have kept me feeling most wanted with their visits and enquiries about all manner of things. Thankfully they haven't yet succeeded in fitting me up with anything but, I remain vigilant.

I have a date pending with Hampshire Police, who have got themselves wrapped up in this big investigation into the theft of some mice and other material from the ghastly Wickham Laboratories in Hampshire last December when it was revealed the labs are en-

grossed in the LD50 and testing Botox on animals on a regular basis.

Some vile things going on there as you would expect, but it is of course recovering rescued mice and stuff that the police have been obsessed with. Again they have my car and various other items. The last car

they took I ended up having to spend weeks chasing Customs and Excise for the recovery of after the

police passed it on to them to find something wrong with it. Neither could. The one before that they sent for scrap and I had to fight through the civil courts to recover compensation. This one has been helping with enquiries for 6 months so far and may, they say, be needed in court as evidence. As if! Feels like there's a theme developing here.

Stupid as it sounds and as inconvenient as it is, it is nice in its own way to be so wanted by enemy soldiers it is always reassuring to know that even if the worst were to come there would be an army of

people with pens and attitude at the ready to help me out in some way.

That VPSG has continued to work so hard for our prisoners is heart warming. While we are all to be proud of our selfless efforts, volunteers on this ongoing project can be especially so for dedicating so much time not just for the animals, but for the activists imprisoned for releasing the animals and so on.

It may not always be so obvious an important tactic in the war on animal exploitation to write a letter to someone you don't know who has been arrested for something or other to do with ALF campaigns or to phone a prison governor about vegan soap but for keeping our brave, irreplaceable troops motivated and positive it is essential we have the VPSG as an integral part of our movement. Life inside is that bit less uncomfortable for having this team committed to our prisoners.

If you write and you don't hear back from someone on the list, don't stop writing. Some activists are less comfortable writing than they are sabotaging. You don't have to say much; just let them know on a

*see next page*

# VPSG News - Greta Ling

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**Kerry was due in court** and having agreed to be his case-worker if, as expected the outcome would be custodial, I had kept my day clear. While groundwork had been done - finding out what prison he was likely to be sent to and clearing the way for hygiene products to be sent in, as the bulk of work would take place as soon as I received confirmation that he was going to jail.

As it turned out it was doubly useful to have the day put by when news arrived informing us that Dave Blenkinsop was getting his long awaited move from HMP Bullingdon to HMP Rye Hill.

Much of the day was spent on the phone to HMP Nottingham and HMP Rye Hill, tracking down catering managers and confirming the expected arrival of vegans.

For Kerry we needed to gain permission to send in toiletries and once we had got this, late afternoon, arranging for the toiletries to be sent in so they would arrive for the next day (Saturday) and be with Kerry before the shut down of a Bank Holiday weekend. As ever Honesty had the order packaged and off to reliably arrive on the next day

where, as you will gather from Kerry's letter, it got to spend a few days in reception, the joys and efficiency of bureaucracy!

So why after countless newsletters informing you of our meetings with the Prison Service at Corby, the hours of research completed at their request and the positive slant that the prison service were at last taking the basic needs of vegan prisoners into account are we still supplying the very basic products such as soap?

It seems the VPSG has been working, to little effect, with the Prison Service at Corby to improve the situation for vegans with regard to products available from prison shops.

A list of products is in the process of being devised between Aramark (the main private tender) and the Prison Service and is due to take effect by the end of July. However

**[Kerry's toiletries] got to spend a few days in reception, the joys and efficiency of bureaucracy!**

this is the same list that was promised to be up and running early last year and the same list that VPSG provided hours of requested research and time attending meetings to ensure that the needs of vegans were met on the list. I am sad to say that the people we worked with at

Corby have all moved to different departments and we, along with our hours of requested work, seem to have been mainly disregarded.

Let's hope we are proved wrong on this one.

Being eternal optimists and never tiring of banging our heads against brick walls we are still working to ensure that vegans will be provided for by the prison system. In the meantime the VPSG will continue to step in where we can and compensate for their failed system.

**Greta Ling**

# VPSG News - Sarah Whitehead

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## Police Custody Research

We found this was an area that really needed updating as more and more vegans in custody found little or no provision made for them.

After extensive questionnaires and input from experiences within various police stations, it seems that most constabularies are now open to accepting food brought in from outside as long the obvious security isn't breached and the source is approved by the VPSG. Soya milk will not be available as a matter of course in most custody suites but we are seeking to change this.

Toiletries are a different matter and we have work to do on the suppliers that police stations will accept. Very few custody suites still use woollen blankets and those that do often have a synthetic alternative avail-

able. So it is vital that all vegans held in custody make their beliefs known as soon as they are arrested, the VPSG is contacted and the wheels set in motion.

We are currently producing fact sheets and newsletters to be sent on a regular basis to all constabularies throughout the UK and we hope that the liaising with the police custody suites will improve the present situation even more. It would be of great assistance if vegans who have been arrested could fill out the questionnaire from the VPSG so that we can address individual police stations as the problems arise.

The response from this research is very encouraging and we are already seeing good progress.

**Sarah Whitehead**

## Ex-Prisoner Letters - Keith Mann

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*continued from previous page*

postcard that you are thinking of them. It makes a big difference.

Maximum respect to everyone inside at the moment and those heading there. I write when I can, but writing has taken something of a secondary role in my life since I got out and other things have taken precedence but let me remind: the sword is mightier than the pen. Certainly there are many many abusers of animals out there who failed to take note of the latter but stopped their dastardly deeds upon receipt of the former.

For the animals

**Keith Mann**

## Ex-Prisoner Letters- John Curtin

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I just wrote to say a big thank you to everyone who has worked in VPSG over the past ten years and to give an extra special "big up" to my old friend Jo-Ann ("Oi, less of the 'old', thank you"). I just cannot imagine what it is like to have that woman on your case. The image that comes to mind is that of the police chief in the Pink Panther films who starts twitching and shaking any time he hears any mention of the name of Inspector Clousseau.

I can imagine a prison governor sitting happily at his desk doshing out punishment to prisoners when he gets a message from his secretary "it's Jo-Ann from the VPSG on the phone for you" at which point a recurring nervous breakdown kicks in. I cannot think of a finer person for the job of hassling the prison system or the police on behalf of vegan animal lib loonies.

I can remember in the bad old days of pre-VPSG days of trying to fight

for your vegan rights as a prisoner. The very first time I went to prison myself and Terry, my co-defendant, had to go on a hunger strike just to get a vegan diet ( well calling it a hunger strike is maybe stretching it a bit coz we were given vegan food by other prisoners). We finally won the day - however, I will never forget my first vegan prison dinner: a boiled onion and half an orange.

There was a time in Walton prison when screws threatened to beat us up if we didn't put leather shoes on. I'm not suggesting that everything is sorted now but at least with the existence of the VPSG there is somewhere to turn to when there is some sort of hassle. And with the threat of having Jo-Ann on their case its like having an exocet missile aimed at their ears at your disposal.

**We finally won the day - however, I will never forget my first vegan prison dinner: a boiled onion and half an orange.**

A movement that doesn't look after its prisoners is doomed to failure and therefore anyone who has worked in any way, shape or form for the VPSG should feel proud of themselves. No doubt there will be a steady trickle of vegans who, in the next ten years, will get the "Do not pass go and go directly to jail" card

because we are not going to give up in our fight for animal liberation which will continually bring us into conflict with the system.

The idea behind the ever worsening police harrassment towards us and ever higher prison sentences is to crush us - well that's not gonna happen and the VPSG has a vital role to play in this struggle.

**Love and liberation, John Curtin**

## Ex-Prisoner Letters - Heather Nicholson

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It's not until you find yourself in prison or in the police station that you realise how important VPSG is. It's funny how important things like soya milk, marmite and bars of soap become when you can't just pop to the shops and buy them.

When you arrive in prison you are

told what you can and can't do and where you have to be at all times of day. It can be a bit of shock and it's hard to explain until you have experienced it.

Jo-Ann and her team are a vital source of strength and it's great to be able to put into words how much

we appreciate their work. Thanks so much to VPSG and everyone who supports them financially and of course all those who write to prisoners.

**Love Heather**

## Ex-Prisoner Letters - Sylvia O'Brien

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**Back in 1999 I was sent to prison for reasons relating to the Hillgrove campaign.** I had never been to prison before and was unsure what to expect, although I knew one day I would leave prison unlike the animals inside HLS. My main concern in prison was to make sure I got a vegan diet and with the help of VPSG I knew I would.

I needed some vegan washing powder and Jo-Ann was on the

case, ringing up the prison Governor constantly and guiding me on how to work from within. I ended up getting 3 packs of washing powder, this was due to the fact that the governor was so fed up of Jo-Ann ringing him asking why I had not received my washing powder that he sourced his own. The screws got fed up of me asking every 10 minutes where was my washing powder that I knew Jo-Ann had sent

in, so they got some from somewhere and then the pack Jo-Ann had sent in arriving from the black hole it had been in. I know if it were not for the VPSG I would never have got my washing powder. When you're not in prison small things may sound petty and trivial but when you are inside it's the small things that keep you going.

**Sylvia O'Brien**



## Ex-Prisoner Letters - Sonia Hayward

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**Supporters of the VPSG** will realise that when I was in prison at HMP Cookham Wood I had a reasonably comfortable time.

This was due to the hard work already done by Tony and Jo-Ann at

HMP Rochester which also caters for HMP Cookham Wood.

I was lucky compared to how vegans were catered for before the VPSG came into existence.

I had no problem in receiving my vegan diet which was often superior to other inmates and I especially enjoyed all the goodies I received in

my weekly vegan pack, but the best bit of all we could have our own toiletries sent in. Believe me they smell much better than the prison issue.

Thanks to all at the VPSG what would I have done without you!

**Sonia Hayward**

## Ex-Prisoner Letters - Gavin Medd-Hall

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I'd like to thank all those who have worked for VPSG over their first ten years for taking on and performing such a valuable service to the movement.

I had been aware of VPSG but until I was unexpectedly remanded for a few weeks had no idea of the work, and the need for the work, involved. I now help VPSG out by keeping a

list of forthcoming court dates to try and help manage the workload of other volunteers. I also send out prisoner updates, i.e. when there are new prisoners, prison moves, etc, so supporters can write to them.

If anyone is aware of any forthcoming court appearances where there is a possibility of a custodial sen-

tence, please let the VPSG office know to ensure a volunteer is available to liaise with the prison service in the worst case.

Once again thank you VPSG for easing the time many of us have had to spend within the prison service.

**Gavin**

## Ex-Prisoner Letters - Gregg Avery

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**Well, where do I start?**

After going in and out of jail for the last 10 years now, one thing has always remained constant and that is VPSG. In a world that is ever changing you cannot put a price on being able to pick up the phone and have Jo-Ann answer and sort out all your problems.

They say Heineken reaches the parts others don't reach well I don't know about weak lager, but that statement is certainly true of VPSG. To be able to go straight over the head of the moronic screws on the wing and with VPSG's help deal straight with the decision makers really gets things moving along. It also marks you apart; here isn't someone who is left on their own, but instead has others on the outside working on their behalf. You really see them thinking, who is this person? Why have we got people ringing us about HIS diet and no one else's?

I know many prison pressure groups come and go but VPSG has re-

mained focused and determined. Dealing with the bureaucrats in Whitehall you have to be polite and



persistent. They only begin to acknowledge your very existence if you've been around for years. They do this for the very reason that by that time many have fallen by the wayside and so they then don't have to deal with them...no such luck for them with VPSG.

One thing that I always think goes unnoticed is the way Jo-Ann has quietly got rules and regulations changed over the years.

Myself coming from a group (SHAC) that demands action now, I can see it would have been so easy for Jo-Ann to be all bolshy and demanding with the Prison service, but she knows that it would have got her, VPSG and us all nowhere. There are times when quiet diplomacy and doggedness are called for and Jo-Ann had the intelligence to see this and that is exactly what she has done. The only rule is doing whatever works whatever that is.

I would personally like to thank Jo Ann for all the help she has given to me and all other animal rights prisoners. I know Jo-Ann doesn't do it for the thanks, but we are all only human and everyone needs their hard work to be recognised. There are so many times I have needed you and you have always come through for me. Thank you.

**Gregg**

## Ex-prisoner Letters - Geoff Shepherd

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**Just a few words** to congratulate VPSG/Jo-Ann and all her helpers on their ten years of tireless campaigning and practical work on behalf of vegan animal liberation activists incarcerated in the Prison System.

With the incredible situation of activists now serving long sentences simply for voicing their protests over the phone, the work of

the VPSG is as important now as ever.

Perhaps many people never truly appreciate the importance of such an organisation, until they themselves are in some wing office or prison shop trying to argue with sometimes uncomprehending or unsympathetic screws for access to vegan toiletries and washing pow-

der, or proper vegan margarine.

There's no doubt about it - you're taken much more seriously when there's an organisation outside of the prison arguing the case alongside of you.

So thanks to VPSG for being and giving us all a little bit more peace of mind.

**Geoff Sheppard**

## Ex-prisoner Letters - Mel Arnold

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**Veganism is not just a diet for me;** it is a mission statement, a way of behaving and taking responsibility for my place on the earth, it's my own internal philosophy and guidance, my psychological and physical well being depends on it. It is, quite, simply a 'way of life'. A life that involves minimising my impact on the natural world by what I choose to eat, wear and buy and a life that is proud to stand up and say I WILL NOT contribute to the oppression of animals, for any reason!

It is no secret to add that I took my mission statement one step further to say I will not only refuse to co-operate with this oppression, but I will make it my life's focus to hamper, impact and obstruct it.

Reasons are many that all of us have chosen and still choose to dedicate our lives to the supporting and protecting of animals; the nations of whom we have evolved, lived and died with side by side during our own collective human development and whether we, as individuals trudge a weary path or stampede it with war cries, we have one need in common; the need for support.

Support with our freedom intact can be financial, emotional or tactical; it can be as basic as a pair of night vision glasses or the knowledge that your comrades' hearts will remain

strong and pure in the face of capture and interrogation.

But what of support after that? If it is you who have been captured and caged for your beliefs? While you're supporting animals and their rights; when the chips are down - who will be supporting yours?



Vegan prisoners of conscience need never worry about that question thanks to the VPSG. The beauty of it is that it grew organi-

cally. It was not the collective decision of many to organise and set up a prisoner support structure but was the decision alone of one woman to support a couple of her friends by mediating on a practical level with Governors, wardens and chefs of the prisons which held them, for a vegan diet and toiletries consistent with their ethics.

And out of this solitary and isolating task developed on extraordinary organisation that through sheer persistence and tact has maintained professional links with all prisons that have ever held an animal rights activist captive in which the rights of a vegan to a vegan diet and toiletries are upheld and supported by the prisons themselves.

It is certainly no coincidence that where prisons are slack in their interpretation of veganism, that they are suddenly academically correct

in the aftermath of a phone call/fax letter from an irate Jo-Ann!

I gratefully accepted the services of the VPSG during both my sentences and it was only the competence and sheer single-mindedness of the founder that prevented the contamination of my food with animal products and enabled me to wash after 3 days of interrogation and isolation!

The psychological impact of having no control over your food is all the more poignant when in the company of hundreds of people who do not and cannot respect your views with no backing or support in place, with no repercussions or hassle from outside - why should a meat eating convict working the kitchens give a damn whether there's pork fat in your stir-fry?

If veganism is a way of life to you as it is for me when free, then it is doubly so and vital when our lives are curtailed and oppressed as in captivity. And the right to be vegan must be acknowledged and upheld in every prison we may find ourselves in.

Jo-Ann has achieved a mammoth task for ex, present and future prisoners in this country and if the saying is that 'the strength of a movement can be measured by its prisoner support' is true, then organisations like the VPSG give the ungovernable force of animal rights its true backbone.

**Melanie Arnold**



## Ex-Prisoner Letters - Mel Broughton

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**Hi everyone, well it's been nearly two years since my release and I seem to be busier than ever.** The VPSG is ten years old and in that time it has achieved major successes on behalf of vegan prisoners.

For those not familiar with the workings of prison it may be difficult to understand just how important the VPSG is and how vital its support is to those ethical vegans who find themselves in the system.

It can never be taken for granted that a prison will automatically understand the full requirements of a vegan and for the prisoner concerned it is a great moral booster to know the VPSG are there to help fight your corner. In my own personal experience I had some problems with aspects of the vegan diet that was being offered to me at 'The Mount', but the hard work of Jo-Ann and volunteers at VPSG meant that together we were able to not only overcome these problems but to educate the prison kitchen staff in the care of vegan prisoners.

Each point of contact made on behalf of a vegan prisoner is a chance for the VPSG to improve the situation for all vegan prisoners now and in the future. It is also the case that the VPSG has been very proactive in contacting prisons and police stations to implement guide-

lines for those whose responsibility it is to make sure vegan prisoners are treated fairly and their dietary and ethical needs are met.

As the animal rights movement moves forward in its fight against animal abuse it seems inevitable that we will continue to find ourselves in conflict with the system that supports it. Those who lose their liberty as a result of fighting



animal abuse will always have the support of the wider movement and the VPSG will be there to make sure that their ethical and dietary needs are treated with the respect they deserve.

On a personal note I will always be grateful for the work that VPSG did on my behalf and their tenacity and careful handling of the problems I faced. The VPSG is an integral part of a movement that is

fighting for the rights of both animal and human prisoners.

Well as I said at the start it has been almost two years since I left 'The Mount' and to be honest I haven't really had time to think about the time I spent inside. One thing I am sure about is that it did have some very positive lessons for me, I can now drink more tea than I ever thought possible and I can walk past a gym and think, "I used to do all that for free".

Another positive experience from 'The Mount' was being able to talk to people about why I was vegan, this led to a surprise meeting after my release. Standing on the SPEAC stall at the Vegan festival in London a year after my release I heard someone say, 'Hi Mel', I looked up and saw a guy who had been on my wing at 'The Mount'. This person had been a veggie during his sentence and we had talked a lot about veganism, he is now a vegan and discovering more about animal rights and an ethical way of life.

The VPSG has made a big difference for a lot of prisoners and for as long as that remains necessary then we all wish you well in the vital work you are undertaking.

**Mel**

## Ex-Prisoner Letters - Robin Lane

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**In June 1988** I was convicted of conspiracy to incite others to commit criminal damage as a result of my role as National ALF Press Officer and my involvement in the ALF Supporters Group and sentenced to 18 months with 9 months suspended.

At HMP Cardiff I was the only animal rights prisoner and in those days prisoners had to prove they were vegan by showing a Vegan Society membership card and as I



wasn't carrying mine I had to wait a couple of weeks until it arrived. I spent two weeks living on poor quality food that gave me stomach problems. However, after the card arrived things improved and I received soya milk, fresh fruit, peanuts, peanut butter and yeast extract.

After a couple of months I was able to get salads but there was no actual co-ordinated effort to provide for vegan prisoners. It was down to the

prisoners themselves to speak to the kitchen staff and the Governor.

With the formation of the VPSG however, it became easier for vegan prisoners to receive the kind of support which they needed the most. The Vegan Prisoner Support Group have been constantly improving the lives of vegan prisoners for the past 10 years.

I wish you all the very best on your 10th anniversary.

**Robin**

# VPSG 10 year poem by Kerry Whitburn

What a time for the Mann, Keith,  
Clogged pores! Rubbing salt on his teeth!  
"Shut up, don't complain! You've got a damn cheek!"  
"How are you hungry? We've fed you a leek!"  
Ignored while the system did as less as they can,  
"A few years of this - you'll be a 'new man',  
Cruelty free hygiene? Diet of compassion?  
Vegan Prisoners ahead - your needs aren't in fashion,  
But out of the mist surrounding the plight,  
The phones nearly melted; the ink ran dry,  
But defeat was no option. The regime WILL reply.  
Provisions lowering with each tired hour,  
But if ignorance is bliss, then knowledge is power,  
Enforce human rights to correct human wrongs!  
"Who are these people?" The Governor's in pain,  
"No time to find out, sir, they've faxed us again!"

Vegan soldiers tackle the Home Office guards,  
Armed with true grit and moralistic shards,  
Eventually bureaucrats became to know,  
The 'opposition' didn't understand "NO",  
So, with victory secured, this now meant,  
Vegan prisoners weren't given up for lent.  
Though the process was slow, and some still resist,  
Vegans behind bars can continue to 'exist'.  
Now, ten years have passed - the future is fair,  
Thanks to solid dedication and care.  
From those who we can't do without,  
So, please support them. There can be no doubt,  
It could be your or a friend; It has been [and is] me  
Requiring the help of the V.P.S.G.

**Luv and respect Kerry Whitburn**

## Vegan Festival

**Sunday 4th July 2004 ★ 10am-7pm**  
**Entry £1.00 (under 16 free)**  
Kensington Town Hall, Hornton Street London W8.  
Tube: High Street Kensington



- Tasty food including cakes, handmade chocs and savouries
- Skincare and footwear
- Drinks at the bar and juices
- Information stalls and speakers
- Children's art workshop
- Acoustic music and more!

**www.londonveganfestival.org.uk**

**Come and visit the Vegan Prisoners Support Group Stall!**

**Many thanks to Robin Lane for paying for the VPSG stall for the last 2 years.**

## VPSG News - Jo-Ann Brown

*continued from page 2*

happiness you gave me letting me share them with such a wonderful companion.

Angie and myself became really good friends from the start and when she and Keith Mann were sentenced and she asked me if I could help them sort their vegan diet and toiletries in prison it seemed only natural to set up a group to campaign for their rights.

However, VPSG was never meant to stay in existence after their release until Gregg Avery and Dave

Callender found themselves in prison and were served that now legendary 'cold corn on the cob' for their xmas dinner... what choice did I have when this cry for help came but to expand my workload... and here we still are and with the help of our team of dedicated volunteers VPSG has grown into the professional organisation we know today; amongst its volunteers it has caseworkers, a researcher, police liaison and two websites.

As old supporters will know our image has changed several times

since the beginning, but the main principles of VPSG have remained the same. Everyone on board at the present time have very similar views and so our progress with so many like minded people working together is finally reaping results as our experience continues to grow.

Greta, Tony and myself are our main caseworkers. In addition Greta still does all our research and continues to work on the Prison Shops Campaign. Tony also sits on our Ex-prisoners Advice Committee as does Gregg, and Natasha. Clare

## Prisoner Letters - Paul Le Boutillier

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*continued from front page*

It costs in the region of £35,000 per year to keep someone in prison and yet the prison budget for food is a paltry £1.40 per prisoner per day? Additionally I receive regular supplies of fruit, marmite, peanut butter, pure spread, peanuts and copious amounts of soya milk; typically 4 litres a week. I normally receive these on a weekly basis, but if I run low or run out I put in an app [application] or write a request on the back of the weekly menu sheet and I then usually receive new supplies within a couple of days. At the time of writing I have eight 1 litre cartons of soya milk in my pad! I do believe the Catering Department and staff are 'vegan aware' and doing their best within the constraints of the system.

The guys on the servery [other cons] also seems very aware and when it is necessary use a spoon or tongs to serve my meal [which is usually supplied in a separate tray] they make a point of getting clean utensils from the cabinet to serve it. I am only aware of one occasion when someone inadvertently used the same tongs as they were using to service chicken legs; I put my contaminated vegan food in the bin!

On entering prison I decided that my ethics would also extend to other aspects of prison life such as

employment. When interviewed during my induction I made it clear that I did not object to employment as long as it was ethical, i.e. no working in the kitchens or servery due to the proximity of animal derived 'foods'.

Similarly I would not do any job for external companies on prison slave rate pay. I am employed as a 'Resettlement Orderly'. This involves interviewing new prisoners regarding claims for housing benefits, terminating tenancies, informing utility companies etc. It also involved assisting prisoners who are approaching their release dates by sending out housing applications and grant applications. This also includes general filing and record keeping. It's a trusted position with minimal supervision, not rocket science, but it makes the time pass quickly. Very importantly for me, I consider it an ethical job and it is of benefit to the other inmates.

When not working, during association I tend to pass the time by chilling out on the landing and chatting with the other inmates. I have found that most of the other inmates that I have spoken to are supportive and find it unbelievable that I got a 5 year sentence for making phone calls to animal abusers. They say it's a 'Political Sentence'. I have even had prison

officers say they support Animal Rights and are surprised by my 5 year sentence. One officer jokingly introduces me to other staff members as the 'Political Prisoner'!

Due to the large number of prisoners and just one small gym I only get two 45 minute session in the gym a week. It would be nice to get gym at least every other day. When banged up I spend my time watching t.v. reading or writing letters.

I have been overwhelmed by all the letters and cards that I have received. I have been sent mail from all over the world, France, Germany, Holland, Sweden, Canada, Hawaii, South Africa and New Zealand. It's fantastic to have such wonderful support.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has written to me. Initially I was trying to reply to everyone, but this has become impossible, I read every card and letter and each one is really appreciated. I like to be told about demos and particularly reports on 'Direct Actions'!

One day I will be free, unlike the poor animals. My body is in prison, but my mind is still free!

For Animal and Human Liberation of Minds and Bodies

**Paul Le Boutillier**

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## VPSG News - Jo-Ann Brown

helps out in the office on a regular basis as well as keeping our supporter's website up-to-date and produces our supporters newsletters along with the prison news sheets. Our other website is kept up-to-date by Alan and Paul helps give us computer support. Gavin handles the emergency mailouts and keeps our court list up to date. Sarah still plods on working alone on her police campaign although the emergency arrests are still dealt with at the office. **She could really do with some help as it is quite a big campaign - is there a volunteer**

**who has computer skills out there willing to help her?**

Overall the aims of the VPSG with the help of our dedicated team are still to campaign for the equal opportunities of our vegan prisoners detained either in police custody or the prison system. While there are still people prepared to put their freedom at risk for the right of animals I feel that a group such as the VPSG must be there to try to help them serve any sentence they may receive. It will continue campaigning to ensure that this minority

group are catered for in police stations and prisons around the country.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our volunteers and supporters for supporting our work and who have made this anniversary edition possible.

**Jo-Ann**

# Vegan Prisoners Support Group

PO Box 194, Enfield, Middx EN1 4YL, United Kingdom.

Emergency Arrest Line: 07743 536 114 (we will call you back)

Office/fax: +44 (0)20 8292 8325 E-mail: [info@vpbg.org](mailto:info@vpbg.org) Web: [www.vpbg.org](http://www.vpbg.org)

PLEASE NOTE: Once you have completed the following standing order form, please return to VPSG, not your bank

## STANDING ORDER FORM

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

Your Address \_\_\_\_\_ Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

To The Manager

Name of Bank \_\_\_\_\_

Branch \_\_\_\_\_

Bank's Address \_\_\_\_\_ Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Bank's Sort Code   -   -   Bank Account Number \_\_\_\_\_

Please pay on the  /  /  and on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of every month until further notice, the sum of £  for the credit of VEGAN PRISONERS SUPPORT GROUP.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

As we are a non-profitmaking organisation with no paid staff, we run on a very tight budget. Supporting the VPSG is important to enable continued support for animal rights prisoners who have risked their freedom for the benefit of their non-human relatives. All donations are directly ploughed back into helping vegan animal rights prisoners of conscience.

A monthly donation of £1.00 (roughly 25 pence a week) will help ensure that we stay in existence. Your support in this way is most vital and gratefully received.

**Please check our website for regular updates: [www.vpbg.org](http://www.vpbg.org)**



# Vegan Prisoners Support Group

Newsletter, March 2005

## Prisoner Letters - Sarah Gisborne

Holloway, the VPSG and me



Like most of the other vegans I know, I love my food - in fact by looking at me you'd think I didn't eat much - WRONG - I have a huge appetite - for everything really especially food!

I will be eternally grateful to Jo-Ann & co for satisfying my insatiable appetite.

After having problems the first week - due to ignorance of some officers and bad communication here at Holloway, VPSG's tireless work sorted it all out and now despite rigorous exercise and swimming I have put on weight (½ stone) which is great.

Jo-Ann arranged a meeting with the head of kitchens here and governor (who failed to turn up). This meeting was very productive and now the food I receive daily satisfies my appetite for all the gym work I do.

Four of my friends here are also now opting for soya milk.

I will be moving prison soon and Jo-Ann is already making preparations for that - I never take for granted the support I have and consider myself a very lucky person.

I know that for the rest of my active life I will have assistance whilst at Her Majesty's Pleasure!

I was getting awful toothache recently - I phoned Jo-Ann and within 3 days I was getting suitable pain killers - what a relief.

To be fit and ready for release we need the VPSG - a vital part of the fight we all have ahead of us.

Keep up the fight!

Sarah.

### Note from Sarah written during VPSG's 2nd visit on 8 Feb 2005:

It was great that Jo-Ann was allowed a two hour visit so soon after my sentencing and to know that the VPSG were there to help me with my vegan needs during my detention in prison. What would I have done without them!

To be blunt for them to be there to help prisoners like me they really need your help at the moment to fund their work. I know that there are so many good causes out there, but if you could send them something so they can continue their work that would be really great.

Sarah Gisborne  
HMP Holloway

### In this issue:

- Letters from prisoners
- Letters from ex-prisoners
- VPSG News
- Neil's Wheels
- Arrest Advice

### Vegan Food in Police Stations

Latest research confirms that the following ambient meals issued in police stations are all suitable for vegans:

- Vegetable Chilli
- Pilau Rice
- White Rice
- Wild and White Rice

### Arrest Advice

Following a request from someone who was arrested recently, we have enclosed the VPSG arrest leaflet, as well as including an abbreviated version on page seven and eight.

If you think there is any chance you will be arrested, please take the time to read it. It makes all the difference going into the arrest situation with some knowledge of what is going to happen. You will also find a list of solicitors to contact while in custody, who have dealt with animal rights cases.

If you are vegan, the VPSG are happy to contact the police station on your behalf to help ensure that you get suitable food and toiletries, please contact us if you find yourself under arrest. We will need to know the name of your solicitor before we can contact the police.

### Sarah's birthday

Sarah Gisborne's birthday is 5 July.

## Contact VPSG

### Postal Address:

PO Box 194, Enfield, Middx EN1 4YL,  
United Kingdom.

Office/fax: +44 (0)20 8292 8325

E-mail: [info@vpbg.org](mailto:info@vpbg.org)

Web: [www.vpbg.org](http://www.vpbg.org)

Disclaimer: The views in the VPSG newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor. Responsibility can not be taken for the accuracy of statements made by contributors or the verification of material sent to VPSG for inclusion in the newsletter.



# Editorial

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We are always humbled by the amount of support the VPSG gets, the support comes in many shapes and forms and we are grateful for them all. In this edition we are sending out an appeal for urgently needed funds. We thought that while we are asking for your cash we would take this opportunity to give an overview of how the wheels of the VPSG turn and also to make some personal thanks. We would like to reiterate that all the support we receive is much appreciated.

Our Catering Information Pack and our presence at the Prison Workshop in November has heightened our profile. This means we take a large number of calls from prisons and some even from police stations on vegan issues on a regular basis.

Every prison has now also been provided with wall charts, cookery books and additional nutritional information and we continue to provide three prison news sheets each year.

Our emergency helpline 020 8292 8325 is available seven days a week in order to offer help and deal with emergency arrests. We also provide information/advice to anyone going to court where we can.

The VPSG continues to be run by volunteers, but funds for office costs i.e. to keep our computers up and running, web sites, telephone, stationery, travel costs for volunteers, money for reception packs and/or nutritional packs, are still needed.

We have never charged a membership fee, and our newsletter is still given free to over 700 people, because we don't think that people on low incomes should be penalised to obtain them.

We know everyone is always asking for your hard earned money, but volunteers at VPSG can only continue their work if VPSG has sufficient funds. If we don't there is the possibility our work might have to slow down or come to a halt while we leave the office to fund raise.

Thanks goes out to all the supporters who have sent us donations from abroad like Sylvia from Switzerland, who even manages to visit our stall in London most years, Danny from Belgium and Margaret from New Zealand to name a few.

A special thanks to Catherine Curran from Oxshot who not only donated very generously to the Neil's Wheels Appeal enclosed in our last newsletter, but when she heard our funds were quickly disappearing sent us a donation to continue our work for the next few months.

We would also like to say a personal thank you to Robin Lane for his donations and once again to Robin and Alison for continuing to give us free stalls at **The Vegan Festival on 25 September at Kensington Town Hall, London.**

We would also have difficulty in providing prisons with all of the information they continually request without

the help of The Vegan Society and Dave who kindly arranged for us to be provided with their free information sheets and cookery books in order for us to provide them to prisons when requested. This helps us to maintain our professional appearances each time we are contacted for help/advice.

As you all know there is help to hand every day on the Helpline, as well as other volunteers working from their homes, like Greta who ploughs her way through project after project as well as being a caseworker and Clare who keeps [www.vpsg.org](http://www.vpsg.org) up to date and who also comes into the office regularly to help keep the office and me under control. Tony is still helping out where he can and Gavin sends out the emergency mail outs and e-mails, Alan looks after our other website [www.vpsg.info](http://www.vpsg.info), Paul X also helps out in the office and Roger, Sonia and Hella come quite a distance to despatch newsletters and last but not least Sarah continues to try to forge ahead with the Police Project. However it all takes funds and at the moment our coffers are low, any help you can give is most welcome and very much needed.

Jo-Ann

*Cheques/Postal Orders can be made payable to VPSG c/o PO Box 194, Enfield EN1 4YL*

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## VPSG News

### Breakthrough in Hygiene Product Range

A whole new range of vegan toiletries - which are also not tested on animals - are now available to all 70,000 prisoners.

This breakthrough follows constant pressure from us, and pressure from you in the form of letters to MPs. Thanks to everyone who wrote. We

have always stressed that if all hygiene products issued to all prisoners were suitable for vegans it would mean any vegan prisoner[s] who found themselves within the Prison System would be able to wash and clean their teeth immediately. They would not have to wait for several days until our emergency toiletry pack arrived!!

The range consists of a Shave Gel, Hair and Body Wash, Toothpaste,

Deodorant and a Low Sud Washing Powder.

### **\*\* New Campaign \*\***

#### **VPSG needs your help to help our Prisoners**

Your help made all the difference in the campaign for vegan toiletries.

*continued on the next page*

*continued from previous page*

We are now asking for your help to finally sort out an issue we first brought to the attention of the Prison Service in 1996!!!

Promise after promise has failed to resolve the lack of opportunities for our vegan prisoners in Prison Shops around the country. So we are asking for your help again in writing another letter to your MP. Having your freedom taken away is obviously the worst part - being away from your loved ones and your animals, but not to be able to buy most of your basic vegan needs each week in the Prison Shop is wrong and together we can put that right.

Your letters worked last time with the hygiene issue when many supporters brought this matter to the attention of their MP's, who in turn wrote to the Minister over Prisons outlining their concerns.

Now the majority of prisons issue vegan hygiene products free to every prisoner [not just vegans] as the prison stock issue. None of them are tested on animals either or we wouldn't have approved them!

### Background for your letter

#### 2002 Director General promises resolution

We have done all we can to press for conclusion of this issue. We have two box files full of correspondence and even received assurances from the then Director of the Prison Service, Mr. Martin Narey early in 2002. Yet the issue still remains unresolved wandering around the Prison System waiting for someone to make a positive decision to offer equal opportunities to vegans.

### Aramark

Aramark are an outside contractor who manage approximately 90% of the Prison Shops around the country and they cater very poorly indeed for vegans. Independent Prison Shops often make special provisions for vegan prisoners but Aramark seem unable to do the same.

Prison Shops are the main source for any prisoner to be able to spend their money on vegan food, toiletries of their choice and other essentials. So if they don't sell it our prisoners can't buy it!

### Lack of Opportunities for Vegans

Non vegan prisoners can choose from a list of several hundred items. If a vegan is very lucky about 1% of the items are vegan, but most are not very interesting.

Here are a few examples. Non-vegan prisoners have a choice of:

3 deodorants - no vegan choice  
9 Moisturising Creams - no vegan choice  
Over 40 items of Animal Protein - no vegan alternative  
20 supplements - none vegan  
29 items of confectionery - none vegan

And the list goes on, pages of items for non vegan prisoners. For vegans the choice is possibly only ready salted crisps or maybe salted peanuts!!

### The VPSG's Work

VPSG's continued attempt to sort this problem out has so far failed although we have put a lot of effort into trying to resolve this issue. Our work has involved endless hours of free research requested by several

different departments within the Prison Service in order to confirm if any of the junk items already on their lists are vegan - pages and pages are not. Numerous e-mails, letters, telephone calls with no conclusion - only promise after promise.

We even attended a Meeting in Corby to discuss the issue. Again promises were made to resolve this issue by 2003. Then it was transferred to yet another department who promised a resolution by the end of 2004/early 2005. Now we are informed it will be sometime in 2006!!!!

We are bemused that it should take 10 years to include equal opportunities for vegans and I am sure you are too.

### Your help needed!

Enough is enough [we need your help](#). It is now nine years since we drew this lack of equal opportunities to the attention of Prison HQ. [Just a short letter to your MP could bring this matter to a conclusion](#) and allow our prisoners to be able to buy some of the following items we have recommended.

A variety of nuts and dried fruits, a flavoured soya milk either chocolate or strawberry, tinned tofu. A few confectionary items, vegan supplements and vegan toiletries. Is this too much to ask - we don't think so we would like to see vegan ice cream and cakes available, a couple of luxury items too - nothing more than the other prisoners can buy. So hopefully you will help again by putting pen to paper.

Please send us copies of any replies from your MP.

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## Donating to the VPSG from abroad

If you wish to donate from abroad it is now possible to transfer money from your bank.

Simply ask for the money to be transferred to the bank account of

the VPSG, and quote the following two numbers.

IBAN number :  
GB10BARC20297760679801

BIC code : BARCGB22

It is really important to use the exact numbers as above, because otherwise it doesn't work.

# Prisoner Letters - Dave Blenkinsop

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## My World

'Prisoners living a life of luxury' scream the right-wing press. Usually they dig up a Christmas dinner menu to compare it to that received by the elderly. But what they don't take into account is the true nature of punishment. Is it not enough for us to be separated from society, from those we love and a life we enjoy? Seemingly not. The true nature of punishment is to put us in an alien environment and to let that become our society. A society that has its own language, its own currency and two sets of rules, one for us and one for them. It is a strange world.

Of course there are hierarchies in this society, but not Mr. Big who smokes Castellias and has his 'fags' running errands for him. Those that shout the loudest get heard, those that just get on with it blend into the background. Guess which category I fall into? Right - the latter of course. I don't get involved with the petty nonsense, the bitchiness, believe me it's full of [malicious] gossips where information is the power

which they monger.

But strangely enough there is etiquette. It is a painfully polite world, if you don't say 'good morning' then it is assumed there is something wrong. You are expected to greet everybody regardless of whether you've already done so. It gets very tiresome after a while; you can't get out of your cell without all those false greetings. The levels of small talk are fantastic. The laundry man talks in spin cycles, the 'library man' in volumes. Dinner is always an issue.

People spend all day speculating on the truth until it becomes the truth, "and that's a fact". Like the time we had a minor disturbance and it became a Strangeway mark two in the vivid imagination of many; watching them swagger to work next morning as if they were returning battle heroes. Most people were in their beds by the time the cavalry arrived!

Imagine a world that you have no control over, where decisions are taken out of your hands, where you are judged by your file, not what you are or who you are. Imagine a world

where you don't have to think to get through the day, where one day is exactly the same as the next, where you get up at the same time, and predict what you're having for dinner for the next four weeks, where you look forward to prison [shop] day, only to realise it's exactly the same order as the week before. That is my world. Tell me that is not punishment!

In this entrenched regime time passes so quickly. I've done nearly four years and it's getting towards the end. I could be out by May 06, that's if they recognise that I am a changed person. I've not exactly suffered, but then again it's not been easy. I've missed your world and I wonder how changed it is. From my limited view of it through the distorted eyes of TV and radio it's fairly harsh. The Twin Towers have fallen and so has the right to free speech. Free speech is a fallacy of liberal democracy in a society that is neither liberal or democratic.

It is the little things that I miss; walking the dogs, cooking, and my own

*continued on page 7*

## Ex-prisoner letters - Wendy Attwood

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Dear Jo-Ann and all at VPSG

Just a note to let you know how I got on at the majesty's pleasure, Foston Hall. I was very lucky as the week I got sent down a new wing had just

opened - a remand wing - and because everywhere else was full I was put on that wing. This meant my own cell with toilet, shower, tv & kettle.

There were only 5 of us to start with but gradually it was filled. I had some really good friends in there which also helped.

I never had much problem with the food they were very up on the vegan diet so I got plenty of what I needed, the marg sachets were all vegan.

It was great to receive the first toiletries pack from Honesty.

The only problem I had was getting my 2nd pack of toiletries because the prison were all over the place,

as I was in a new wing, and they had forgotten to send it through from reception.

Prison overall wasn't like I expected, it is certainly not nice having your liberty taken from you, but mine was only a short sentence - I spent a total of five and a half weeks, so it wasn't too bad - can't speak for those who have served longer though. I'm not going to pretend either and say it was nothing, but everyone is different and deals with it differently.

Thanks VPSG for your help you are invaluable. Thanks also to everyone who wrote and sent in money - much appreciated.

Wendy x



# Prisoner Letters - Paul le Boutillier

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Just had my "1st anniversary" on 26 February and should be out in the summer.

The first five months I was at HMP Hull and things ran pretty smoothly, no major issues receiving vegan food or ordering vegan toiletries.

The problems started after being transferred to HMP Wealstun in late July.

Meals are selected about two weeks in advance from a menu that utilises symbols to indicate whether a meal is Vegan, Vegetarian, Halal or "Healthy Option". This last one is a joke; there is nothing healthy about prison food! I immediately became suspicious about their understanding of veganism when the symbol for vegan [a black dot] appeared alongside dishes such as 'Cauliflower Cheese'. 'Pizza' and 'Vegetable Pie' that has a 'creamy filling' <sup>1</sup>. I knew it was highly unlikely that the prison food budget stretched to vegan cheese. They claimed these were typographical errors, but 7 months on they still have not been corrected.

I also had problems receiving the weekly 'Vegan Packs'. Sometimes they were issued late, items were missing some weeks, i.e. only 1.5 litres of soya milk instead of a minimum of 3.5 litres [0.5 litres per day recommended].

It took several weeks, numerous complaints forms and a meeting with the Catering Manager before these issues were resolved.

Personal Hygiene Products were another problem at Wealstun. The Canteen run by 'Aramark' offers very little choice for vegans. There is only one expensive shampoo, one expensive vegetable oil soap and one expensive toothpaste. No vegan shower gels, shaving products or Washing Powders.

At HMP Hull I submitted an application form to the Governor for permission to order vegan personal hygiene products, including washing powder from 'Honesty Cosmetics Ltd'. Within a few days he granted

permission. No problem. However, at Wealstun it was a totally different story! I submitted an application, this was refused. I submitted Complaint Forms to the Governor, 'Independent Monitoring Board' and 'Race relations' [as this was a discrimination issue] still no permission.

The response was that 'Honesty Ltd' were not an approved supplier on the 'facilities list' and that they would be considered for adding at the next review meeting, this I was told would be in the next week or so. Why does it take a committee to make a simple decision?

The weeks passed by! Jo-Ann then contacted the Governor who agreed to allow the VPSG to send in some products from Honesty, but this was not a satisfactory permanent solution. Eventually after diplomatic and persistent representation from VPSG and threats of legal action from yours truly Honesty were added to the 'facilities list', but only for vegan prisoners. It took a total of 7 weeks to resolve what could have been authorized in a few days as it had been at HMP Hull.

My threat of legal action was not an empty threat as I believe that I and all vegan prisoners have a good sound case that can be fought on these grounds:

## 1. Discrimination

The Prison Service claims to have a policy of equality and non-discrimination. For example if I had required specific food or personal hygiene products because of religious beliefs then they would have ensured these were provided or made available. Whilst veganism is not a religion the philosophies of vegans are just as important and should be respected.

## 2. Human Rights Legislation

It is an infringement of our fundamental human rights to be deprived of products that we require to enable us to live our chosen ethical lifestyle.

## 3. Health and Safety Legislation <sup>2</sup>

It is obviously a threat to our health and therefore safety and to those

around us to be deprived of personal hygiene products!

The VPSG has been liaising with the Prison Service at various levels for 10 years trying to resolve these issues as well as the ongoing saga of the "Aramark" canteen. I admire all the volunteers at the VPSG for their patience and persistence.

Aramark with their extortionate prices are making a fortune from prisoners, they have quite literally a 'captive market'! The prison canteen should be opened up to competition; I would like to see it run by the Co-op. I am a fan of the Co-op, whilst no supermarkets are totally ethical [they all sell murdered animal parts] the Co-op seems to have the most honest and clear labelling of food and non-food products. They also have relatively low prices! Just one example:

Aramark - Suma brand Vegetable Oil Soap - £1.06 per bar <sup>3</sup>

Co-op - Own brand vegetable oil soap - £0.25\* per bar

\*price based on just before I came inside

Aramark do not seem interested in the vegan market. If they sourced a wider range and sold cheaper vegan products they could also be purchased by non-vegan prisoners as well.

Finally I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has written to me, prisoners support is very important. It has become impossible to respond to every letter or post card, but each is read and appreciated. I particularly like to read about A.R. actions.

For Animal and Human Liberation of Minds and Bodies. Paul

<sup>1</sup> As soon as VPSG was made aware that this was still a problem we contacted the kitchens.

<sup>2</sup> Fortunately all the new prison issue toiletries are now vegan.

<sup>3</sup> Suma's recommended price is 69p. VPSG have contacted the Prison Service and await their reply.

# VPSG News - Visit with Sarah

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**Wednesday 8th February 2005**

It was a bitter cold night and the snow was driving down hard as I returned home from my visit with Sarah. I thought to myself that most people my age would be in the warm listening to the radio or watching tv - for a moment I envied them. But then I thought even after working as a volunteer for VPSG for almost eleven years, that life isn't for me just yet, not as long as I can help people like Sarah who are prepared to put their freedom at risk for their beliefs that animals have rights too.

I found Sarah in good spirits and mentally positive, she was still planning how to best use her time in prison, possibly by doing a law course, but nothing was definite at the time of my visit, just that she was pressing ahead with her appeal. She had already made some converts amongst other inmates to a compassionate diet and has asked me to send in the Why Vegan leaflets for her campaigning.

Obviously, such a long sentence means she has had to take a long look at what she has for the moment left behind - her little dog 'Daisy' and her horse 'Jude'.

Daisy is a lovable little dog and is everyone's favourite and although she must miss Sarah she is well looked after by Heather.

Jude is a little more difficult to sort out and she is at the moment trying to find a permanent home where he can be happy with other animals as he loves company. It has to be somewhere without access to grass as he gets laminitis. If anyone can help please write to Sarah or drop us a line and we will pass the offer on.

Jo-Ann

## Sentencing - Kerry Whitburn

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*Kerry Whitburn received 120 hours community service on 18 Feb 05*

On Friday 19th February, I appeared at Leicester Crown Court for sentencing on an affray charge in relation to the Newchurch Guinea Pig Campaign. My previous experiences of sentencing encouraged me to expect the worse, as I'd never left a court before after being sentenced! No, usually I'd be on my way to the local prison. Also the present government and media hysteria surrounding animal rights would make the most optimistic amongst us suspect a negative outcome.

However, after the usual courtroom drama that would have even Shakespeare drooling, the judge sentences me to 120 hours community service, with £150 court costs! In his summing up, he told me that he was 'uncomfortable' sending me to prison for an offence committed in September 2003 [a fact of which he was only made aware of that day, by my barrister!] as I'd also been to prison twice since this offence.

The judge had also told the prosecuting barrister that he was 'unhappy' that it had taken ten months for the forensic evidence to be con-

firmed; even to the point of saying he couldn't believe it had taken that long for the police to receive confirmation.

Read what you will into that, but let me give you a clue: two days after I came off tagging, following my release from Nottingham prison a month before, Leicestershire Police arrived at my flat to arrest me for this offence!

As I said, I was expecting to go to prison - but just because I didn't wouldn't have meant the work VPSG had already done in case I did was any the less. Some of you may not realise, but the VPSG contact begins with the potential prison, more or less immediately any trial date is known to ensure the prison is aware of our needs and that there are proper provisions in place in the event they suddenly arrive there after the trial.

In my case, Leicester Prison would have received contact from the VPSG well before 18 February. Issues surrounding my diet, footwear [some prisons still don't allow a prisoner's own footwear] and hygiene requirements are paramount and need to be understood by the prison before my arrival.

I once made the mistake of forgetting to inform the VPSG I was due in court until the night before - much too late for them to ensure everything was in place! So I had a nightmare during my first few days while they were trying to sort things out, because once you're in their system it's much easier for the prison to fob you off. Luckily VPSG managed to get everything sorted quite quickly.

So a couple of weeks before my sentencing this time, it was comforting to know I'd at least be understood when/if I arrived at prison thanks to the VPSG.

You don't always hear about all the work VPSG tackles in the background. They just quietly get on with it. For instance they get in contact with the appropriate police station as soon as they know that someone has been arrested as it could mean they be held in a police station for hours and sometimes overnight without vegan food. As well as helping with the many, many problems a vegan prisoner needs help with during their sentence. It all takes time and MONEY! Get my point? I hope so!

For Liberation Kerry



## HMP Catering Conference

The Vegan Prisoners Support Group was invited to attend the HM Prison Service National Catering Workshop Conference of 2004. It was a 3 day conference and the VPSG attended two of the three days. We held an information stall and received a very positive response from the prison catering managers who came by the stall. It was a good opportunity to meet in person with many of the people we work with over the phone on a day-to-day basis.

We also attended and had input into a broad selection of the workshops that had been put on. Among these

## Prisoner Letters - Dave Blenkinsop

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*continued from page 4*

personal space. Its not going to be easy and my rose-tinted spectacles are crushed under the ass of some fat screw.

I suppose you want to know about the current abode. Well it is easy, laid back and dare I say it; luxurious. I have my own cell, adequate vegan fare, music, plants, kettle and just about all I need. It doesn't get easier than this, but alas it is time to move again. I regained my 'Cat C' after it was taken away at Bullingdon and hence need to go to a 'Cat C' jail. I suspect that this may be in the beginning of the summer. Although I realise that it doesn't get better than this, I've got to do all I can to improve my chances of parole, not just for me, but for my long suffering partner and elderly parents whose time is running out.

I'm sorry that I can't reply to your letters, my efforts must be concentrated on my nearest and dearest. I am grateful, just as I am grateful to the VPSG for all the frustration they've had to endure. The braised tofu certainly baffled the prison!

Regards Dave xx

were Nutritional Menus, Getting the Balance Right and Reducing the Use of Dangerous Foods.

There was social time worked into the conference agenda and VPSG made the most of this time to meet with catering managers from specific prisons and with representatives from companies who supply to the prison service.

We weren't very popular by the evening - when others were attempting to unwind with the compli-

mentary drinks and VPSG representatives were looking at badges to seek out who was from where and asking them questions like what brand of margarine do they use in their prison kitchen and would they be interested in being part of our soya dessert trial.

Our presence at the conference was constructive and we feel the ongoing results will prove to be very productive.

Greta

## Neil's Wheels

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'We would like to say a huge thank you to all who contributed to the Neil's Wheels appeal.

Those of you who attended Jill's day may have seen Neil zooming around in his new wheelchair, he is now well and truly mobile. His chair has been custom made to fit his body, shape and all his specific needs. He has the bonus of a motorised attachment for those times when he needs some extra oomph.' Greta

Neil said, "Thank you very much, the wheel chair is very light and I can get around much easier, it's helping me campaign for the animals as I am in much less pain in this comfy chair. As I have to be stuck in a chair it is nice to be in one that the movement has



brought for me, it's nice to know that people care."

## Arrest Advice

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***Below is an abbreviated version of the VPSG arrest leaflet. The full version is also enclosed seperately.***

### Solicitors

If you are arrested you have the right to speak to a solicitor of your choice free of charge at the police station.

It is not advisable to accept a duty solicitor, they may be biased and this can be undermining if you get advice you don't want to follow.

The following solicitors can be contacted 24 hours a day:

- Birds (Tim Greene) 020 8874 7433
- Walkers (Tim Walker) 020 8800 8855
- Kieran Clarke (Kevin Tomlinson) 01246 211006
- Kellys Solicitors (Theresa Blades & Lydia Dagostino) 01273 608311

### Other Entitlements

You are allowed to have someone informed of your arrest. Often the

*continued overleaf*

## Arrest Advice

*continued from page 7*

police will say that you cannot make the phone call yourself. If they say this remind them that you are legally entitled to one phone call other than the calls to your solicitor. You are also entitled to read a copy of the Codes of Practice Guidelines on police powers; and to have writing materials.

### Processing

You will be searched and you will have your details taken. It is advisable at this or at any other time only to give your name and address.

Though you don't have to give your name and address it may affect the chances of you getting bail if you do not, as the police may want to verify where you live.

### Length of detention

You can be held for up to thirty six hours without being charged, but for minor offences you will usually be out within six hours.

### Food

The police have a duty to provide vegetarian/vegans with the appropriate meal and three meals a day should be offered at recognised meal times.

### In interview

The police may question you before

you are charged, but not after. You have the right to remain silent. Most defendants choose to remain silent during interviews,

The police warning intimidates many people into making statements that they later may regret. The interview is regarded by the police as an important tool for obtaining evidence against you and many cases only get to court as a result of what the defendant said to the police.

### Fingerprints, photos and DNA

The police can take the fingerprints, photo and DNA with the use of "reasonable force", from anyone who has been arrested for a recordable offence.

### Being charged with an offence

If you have been charged, the police will either release you on bail to appear in court at a later date, or hold you until the next available court. If you are bailed it may be subject to conditions - e.g. on condition that you sign on each week at the local police station.

### Release without charge

If released without charge, it may be on police bail, where you are bailed to appear at a police station at a later

date. The police cannot attach conditions to this kind of bail.

### Remand to prison

If you are remanded, you will first go to the reception area of the prison/remand centre, to be 'processed'. The reception process involves your details being logged into the computer and filed. At this point you should be asked about your diet and religion which is when it is essential you mention you are vegetarian/vegan, to prevent problems later on. You will also be strip searched (usually one half at a time), you may be asked to shower and should be allocated toiletries.

You will be given a free stamped envelope, a free phone call (or the opportunity to buy a phone card and make a call) and a 'reception V.O.' and should see a doctor before being allocated a cell.

If you are vegan and held either in police custody or remanded it might be advisable to contact VPSG on the emergency arrest line:

**020 8292 8325**

We offer advice and practical assistance on obtaining vegan food and toiletries.

## Vegan Prisoners Support Group

**PO Box 194, Enfield, Middx EN1 4YL, United Kingdom. /fax: +44 (0)20 8292 8325; e-mail [info@vpssg.org](mailto:info@vpssg.org)**

### STANDING ORDER FORM

PLEASE NOTE: Once you have completed the following standing order form, please return to VPSG, not your bank

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

Your Address \_\_\_\_\_

To The Manager

Name of Bank \_\_\_\_\_ Branch \_\_\_\_\_

Bank's Address \_\_\_\_\_

Bank's Sort Code    -    -    Bank Account Number \_\_\_\_\_

Please pay on the  /  /  and on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of every month until further notice, the sum of £

for the credit of VEGAN PRISONERS SUPPORT GROUP.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

As we are a non-profit making organisation with no paid staff, we are on a very tight budget. Supporting the VPSG is important to enable continued support for animal rights prisoners who have risked their freedom for the benefit of their non-human relatives. All donations are directly ploughed back into helping vegan animal rights prisoners of conscience. A monthly donation of £1.00 (roughly 25 pence a week) will help ensure we stay in existence. Your support in this way is most vital and gratefully received.

# Vegan Prisoners Support Group

Newsletter, November 2005

## Prisoner Letters - Heather Nicholson



First of all many thanks to the VPSG who were on to the prison before I even got here.

Well here I am again in prison, it was bound to happen sooner or later. It feels strange writing a piece about my third prison stay. As if I am some kind of restaurant critic!

Like most prisons everything is very slow. You ask and ask and ask for things and nothing happens. I should be out in a few weeks anyway so I'm feeling quite relaxed.

It's easy to find someone you get along with. A young woman with a very tragic story is in here with me and she really made me laugh with this story - she is from abroad and has never been to the UK before, she rang her boyfriend back home and because the only insight they have into prisons here is from watching 'Bad Girls', he urged her

to punch an officer in the face as hard as she could at the earliest opportunity, so that she would be put in solitary confinement and be safe!

I have had plenty of fruit so far and I'm sure the food will improve with time. The prison issue toiletries are mostly vegan so I have shampoo and toothpaste (the deodorant is too but I never use it).

As I am writing this I have just received an enormous bouquet of flowers from my friends! I have also received cards and I've only been here two days!

Another quick example of the frustrations of being in prison - when you arrive they give you a free sheet for a letter...but no pen. Getting hold of this pen has been near enough impossible. I asked an officer if I could borrow one and she said "You will have to buy one from the canteen". How can I fill in my canteen sheet without one? Borrowing is also strictly against the rules!

Anyway apart from all that I am doing just fine and it is quite pleasant here. I will be out within weeks or at most a couple of months I hope, so don't worry about writing to me too much.

Loads of love  
Heather

P.S. It is certainly no holiday camp here but announcements over the Tannoy are preceded by "Bing Bong".

### In this issue:

- Letters from prisoners
- Letters from ex-prisoners
- VPSG News

## Prisoner Letters- Jan Lawrence



*Jan wrote this letter from HMP Peterborough, but has since been moved back to HMP Bronzefield.*

Dear VPSG

Many thanks to you for all your efforts and support on my behalf. I am now settled in at HMP Peterborough, another new, privately run prison, operated by UKDS, same as Bronzefield.

Of the two Bronzefield was by far better. The food there was really

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# Editorial

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## AM I STILL ON YOUR MAILING LIST?

Quite a few supporters have been contacting the office recently asking if they have been taken off our mailing list as they haven't received a recent newsletter. Just to assure all supporters, we only remove names if requested to do so. Although funds are not great at the moment, as long as we are able, we still send out newsletters to everyone on our data base. The reason is we want to try to provide prisoners with maximum support and we feel receiving information on our prisoners shouldn't depend on whether someone can afford it or not.

The reasons why there hasn't been a newsletter up until now, is that there hasn't realistically been time to fit it in.

## Help needed!

The backlog of work shows we now need more volunteers in order to start spreading the workload. At the moment only Greta and myself have any prison contact experience, which is essential in order to help our prisoners.

So if you have a computer and a few spare hours each week you could help our prisoners and also work from home. Just give us a call on 0208 292 8325.

## What work gets done next?

Often we have our deadlines and priorities to meet, then just as we start work on them our help is sought to deal with arrests, which are on the increase at the moment. This coupled with the sudden unexpected influx of prisoners with their individual needs, has meant some of our campaigning is moving much slower than planned.

## Prison Service Guidelines

We also need to try to keep an eye on the Prison Service regarding the care of vegans, because recently the Guidelines which we had accepted in 1996, nearly vanished. This was due to someone in the Prison Service, for some strange reason, deeming they were no

longer required. Their plans were to replace them with a few lines of a Prison Service Order! It took a lot of concerted effort to convince them that they need to stay in existence. We have now been informed that the new wording will be submitted to us for our approval. We are still wondering how you can change the wording of a perfectly clear document! In the meantime the current guidelines are still being used.

*We may need your help* on this one by participating in a letter writing campaign. Keep your eye on our website for more information or drop us a line to say you are prepared to write - we can't always do it alone and sometimes need your help.

## Vegan prisoners right to supplements being challenged

Recently, Roz has started helping Dave at The Vegan Society with some of the prisoner work and at the moment we are both campaigning through the Department of Health for prisoners to have the right to be provided with supplements, especially an iodine [kelp] supplement which vegans require for the proper functioning of the thyroid gland. So far we have been able to send them in to some of our prisoners, but are still trying to obtain permission from Bronzefield. As Jan mentions in her letter [see front page] Healthcare Departments issue out drugs to other prisoners all the time!

We have decided in future, instead of providing supplements to prisoners that just contain Iodine, that we will be issuing VEG1 as it contains other essential vitamins and minerals for vegans.

## New supplement

You may be interested in taking this supplement yourself so here are the details; VEG1 is obtainable from the Vegan Society on 01424 427 393 each tub contains a 90 day supply of tasty chewable tablets and they are at a reasonable price too!

## Prison shop issue

We are still working on the Prison

Shop Issue, but in the meantime endeavour to help prisoners gain access to bodycare essentials until the items we have recommended are available on canteen listings. We have been informed that all our recommendations should be added on the 2006 listing. Nothing outrageous, just items such as lip balm, moisturiser or conditioner and some healthy and nice-to-have vegan food products.

Thanx to all the supporters who wrote to their M.P.s earlier this year on this issue; your efforts weren't wasted and it would have been more difficult without your help.

## Keeping up to date

In future, if we haven't had time to compile a newsletter, please visit our website [www.vpsg.org](http://www.vpsg.org) to keep yourself up to date with prisoner news. Our prisoner list is always kept up to date by Paul, which includes any moves of prisoners and Alan keeps our info site up to date. Supporters without access to computers only have to request to be added to our emergency mailing list and they will receive a mailout informing them of new prisoners or prisoner moves.

## VPSG office now ship shape thanx to Paul

Before Paul came to help out on a regular basis in the office, there was paperwork and filing everywhere. This was due to volunteers often working under pressure and the priorities they were dealing with constantly changing, and meant that sometimes paperwork found itself in the wrong place. It often used to take ages to find that important piece of paperwork or the file you needed urgently for a telephone call. Now the office is ship shape, everything in its right place, obviously this speeds things up. Thanx Paul you are terrific I know it was a dreadful task to put right.

## Good news

We have two more volunteers, Audrey coming on board in January

*continued on the next page*

## Prisoner Letters - Kerry Whitburn

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Hi everyone, hope you are well. First let me say a heartfelt thanks to everyone who has written to me. Much appreciated. Apologies to anyone I've not replied to but to be honest there are times I don't feel like writing.

I arrived here on the evening of 30/09/05. The prison is still not up to date with supplying the vegan shower/body wash even though VPSG has been campaigning hard for prisons to do this. However, they DID allow us to bring in our own vegan toiletries which kind friends had left at Burton Police station for us.

They are on the ball when it comes to a vegan diet though. From the moment we arrived we've enjoyed a balanced and (fairly) varied diet. No living on salads here! Outside I only wear boots, but unfortunately we're not allowed to wear them here. So I was expecting to have to wear these horrible plastic slippers I had to wear in 2002 when I served a week on remand here! But NO! They now actually provide vegan shoes! Bit weird though as I've worn

boots since I was about 23 (I'm 36 now)...so for the first few days I felt like my feet had fallen off!

Also, for the first time in ANY prison I've been to, we can buy VEGAN TOILETRIES from the prison canteen! What a bonus! There are, I hear, about twenty other vegans here so the improvements are obviously due to VPSG input. With this they CAN'T go wrong.

I'm ok, the hardest part of all this is being away from my beautiful special girlfriend Jo. I'm missing my friends and dogs too. But I know it won't be forever.

Well folks, take care.  
Love and wishes

Kerry xxxx

## Prisoner Letters - Sarah Gisborne

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To achieve equality for vegan prisoners is a hard job and a very slow process. Jo-Ann and all at VPSG never give up on us and that is vital. With us pushing as prisoners from within and VPSG doing it from outside, I have found improvements since I was remanded last November.

I've been at Cookham Wood for five months now and have achieved small but vital goals. The prison now provides vegan washing powder for my laundry. They didn't like the idea at first but it is an equality matter and one which we persisted on for several months.

Jo-Ann has also spoken regularly to the Head of kitchens and the menu has improved greatly. I'm eating well now and I get kelp supplements sent in as I wasn't getting any iodine. I send to VPSG diet sheets of what I eat daily and they monitor my diet with a nutritionist – thankfully.

My weeks here are very active so my diet is crucial in maintaining my fitness and health, especially as it is a reasonable length of sentence. I work as a gym orderly, although I do not use any of the cleaning products. This is another area I have to work on – all in good time.

I am running a marathon shortly and am running outside several times a week. Hence my food intake is quite high.

I buy my toiletries from Honesty via mail order and now I am feeling more settled here.

As a vegan in prison I feel I have been a very positive role model for all vegans and their lifestyle, with more prisoners switching to veggie/vegan diets including taking soya milk. They see how strong and healthy I am and it gets them thinking.

By being persistent and polite and not giving up we can achieve so much for vegan prisoners now and those that will undoubtedly follow.

Thank you to everyone who supports VPSG and me. Other vegans abroad are envious of our VPSG and the help we get and it is vital that their work continues for all of us.

Your support is amazing.  
Always for them!  
Sarah

*In October Sarah had her sentence reduced by one year on appeal. She now has a five and a half years sentence.*





# Prisoner Letters - Dave Blenkinsop

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## How Far to Freedom

Time is moving apace. I'm in the process of applying for parole which will hopefully lead to my release in May. This will be my earliest chance of release and the process is well underway. So what awaits me out there?

I'm not quite sure about that. From a world where everything is regimented and orderly to a world of chaos and uncertainty.

Upon release I will be closely supervised by the probation service who have the power to send me back behind bars for the slightest misdemeanour. More and more people are getting recalled to prison on the whim of an over zealous probation officer.

Of course it is my intention to live a lawful existence and to adjust accordingly.

I've a lot of time to make up with my partner who has been through this with me. There are the handful of friends who have never deserted me and I owe them a lot. I suppose I will need to find a job and a purpose.

My old dog died last month. He's been with me for many years and those that knew him will know how special he was. It won't hit me till he's not there by my side. I'm strangely removed from his departure at the moment just as I'm strangely immune to everything beyond those high walls.

I live in a society so different from yours and it is these differences that take their toll on me. Can you imagine engaging in a conversation where you know that the person isn't listening and attempts to switch the discussion to talk about themselves.

Anybody who has ever been in prison knows that this phenomena predominates. A society of self absorbed ill-thinking individuals that delight in others misfortune.

It's not a pleasant society and I find myself increasingly on the margins. My friends in here are few but are similarly removed from it's vindictive ways.

But it's not all bad. I've done a few courses to improve my chances of parole, my diet is adequate and I live an easy life within the restraints of a failing system. Needless to say I'll be glad to see the back of it, but what awaits me? Your world isn't looking that good either.

As always, thanks to Jo-Ann and Greta of the VPSG. Your support and diligence is a credit to you both. Thanks.

Respect Dave xx

## VPSG News - Karen

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Before I rather casually asked if there was anything I could do to help I had no idea of the phenomenal amount of time and effort that has gone into VPSG over the years, and still today - truly deeply impressive.

It is clear that, thanks to all the hard work and sheer determination of Jo-Ann, the vegan prisoners, all the volunteers and VPSG supporters,

the situation is vastly improved now, beyond recognition from earlier days (cold corn-on-the-cob on Xmas day?!).

Unfortunately though it seems there is still a little way to go as regards getting the system to accept and carry out its responsibility to provide equal opportunities for vegan prisoners. Of course, given the incredible past achievements and continu-

ing endeavours of VPSG we can be entirely confident that will happen and not too far in the future...so I'm particularly delighted to be joining the team at this stage!

Take care

Karen

## VPSG News - Audrey

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Reading prisoners' comments in the VPSG newsletter, I wondered how I would feel if in prison, and realised just how important this support group is for vegan prisoners. Of course, family and friends buoy up emotionally, but to have

an organisation such as the VPSG, now accepted by the establishment, outside effectively 'batting' for prisoners' entitlements, must give much comfort to those temporarily removed from freedom.

With the VPSG workload now expanding, I decided to offer my services to Jo-Ann and the other volunteers, and have now been taken 'on-board', and look forward to meeting the tasks in hand!

Audrey

# Ex-Prisoner Letters - Keith Mann [1]

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1st October 2005

Punished with 6 months prison in April I wasn't expecting to still be inside in October and didn't suppose I'd have the time needed to improve the dietary provisions too much. It takes longer than this to get anything done in a prison especially with a transfer in the middle of it. A few weeks in Winchester then on to The Weare pending release. Then things went a little awry!

The Attorney General Lord Goldsmith appealed against my sentence for being in his view "too lenient" and instead of being released after three months, on 15th July I was given a further 12 months to begin the day I was due out.

Suddenly I found myself in the position of counsellor to others around me. One who was sentenced to 9 months for stabbing someone he'd robbed to feed his crack habit, another with 12 months for breaking the jaw of someone during a drunken student bashing session.

Both were content with their sentences – that the same thing wasn't likely to happen to them because the authorities aren't bothered about such behaviour. They, like most people, were perplexed by the intervention of the Attorney General, but were quietly happy that his interest was in those offences that didn't cause physical harm to people.

The extension of my Time-Out has given me the time needed to make some change in the way vegans and vegetarians are fed. Most catering managers are happy to keep the vegan options basic as if that's how they're meant to be and because they aren't used to anything else, but will with a little coercion, aided in no small part by VPSG, make an effort.

I spent six weeks in Winchester with a cell mate, tv and 23 hour bang up. I was given 600g of Marmite every two weeks, peanuts, peanut butter, dried fruit and so much fresh fruit I nearly had to ask for less. Nearly. One week by hook or by crook I ended up with 50 pieces. Aside from these supplements there was nothing

special on offer beyond the unimaginative array of vegetable-based meals prison kitchens are known for, which are distinguishable only by name.

I was allowed a lovely big Lush order sent in without drama which I figured would see me through to release easily. Only having a few weeks to do I got to counting down the days, not something I dared consider on my last sentence, due to the length of it. Let me tell you it's a mistake no matter how long you're doing! Especially with a shifting release date.

I was transferred to The Weare, the C-category floating prison ship on the Dorset coast, to finish off. Now held in a cabin with en suite shower and toilet and air conditioning this was something of a novelty briefly, but that wore off. The facilities were limited – the air con as clapped out as the ship – not the place to be in mid-summer. The cabins on the inner didn't even have the view of the sea just another cabin.

I have, I have to say, been humoured whenever I've requested a non-smoking cell mate in all three prisons and been moved closer to home with each transfer. My cell mate on The Weare went vegan too, having resisted his wife's efforts to turn him vegetarian for 9 years! His biggest fear wasn't the usual one about protein deficiency, but whether he'd become a target of the authorities. I lied, I said no.

Catering staff on The Weare were very helpful and came to see me soon after I arrived having had a delivery of material from VPSG. I was asked what I wanted to eat. As neither I nor the ship were due to be there for much longer, there was no point in preparing long-term changes and we agreed a large fruit salad with nuts, grated carrots, onions and mushrooms would do the job at the end of each day and it did!

Just before I was due to be released I was informed that my sentence had been increased and I was moved to Guy's Marsh in the Dorset countryside, a rather less grim container for prisoners.

Here we have free access to the well-tended grounds most evenings. I run the perimeter for 5 or 6 miles when the gym is in short supply. This set me in good stead for my race (800 metres) in the sports day over the August bank holiday, which I won by a distance over younger opposition. I tell them all it's the soya milk.

What is still slightly irritating is having to reply to people who still believe that if they stop eating meat the cows will take over! Thankfully not everyone is so stupid and I have been able to tempt at least a couple here off meat.

The kitchen has willingly changed some of the poor vegetarian meals to something more appetising and are happy to keep improving things within budget. I've spent so much time there they offered me a job.

The canteen however still leaves a lot to be desired despite the work VPSG has done to improve things. There are nuts, fruit juice and hobnobs on offer between the pages of non-vegan choices. That said, as I write we are said to be days away from the long-awaited improvements which should see the vegan options increase in all prisons. It remains to be seen what these are, but I've pledged to make myself sick of them all!

Said to be one of the more progressive prisons in the system there's £30-35 a week on offer in the packing shops. I'm happy with the £7 they pay in the Braille unit, learning to read and translate books for the RNIB. It is a lot to take in but far less tedious and more productive than packing light-fittings into bags at 6p a go.

I'm in a single cell now with my telly, my music, my fruit, my nuts and a generous stream of correspondence. I'm rested and recharged. It's not quite the life of a rat in a cage but I'm far from content and I wanna go home. My work here is done.

For the animals

Keith

# Prisoner Letters - Keith Mann [2]



22 July 2005

Sorry for the delay in sending this, but as you can appreciate the last couple of weeks have been a touch unsettling.

I was due to be released next week and have been working myself up for that, but the Attorney General wasn't happy about that and appealed against my sentence for being too lenient. He was successful and got it increased from 230 hours Community Service to twelve months inside, to begin the day I was due to be released from the six months I got for contempt of court. In the meantime I have been moved from The Weare to Guys Marsh.

This is the third prison I've been in in three months and I am again in the process of ensuring the kitchen understand what a vegan is.

Thanks in the large part to the work the VPSG have done in the years since I was last inside, this task is quite easy once the catering staff appreciate I am a genuine vegan. It does create a stumbling block that some inmates claim to be while picking and choosing what they'll eat from the rest of the menu, but

once it's established a genuine vegan exists I have found the kitchen staff keen to help.

At Winchester I was given piles of fruit each week and a vegan pack and three meals a day that I had no concerns about being vegan, although it has to be said a meal didn't always arrive at mealtime and often had to be shooed up.

As an apology it would usually be accompanied by something extra which made it worth waiting

for. To complement the nutritional information provided by VPSG it helps to remain polite and patient – it's not what they tend to get from inmates whose meal options have been messed up.

Vegan toiletries are still in short supply in most prisons if you want something other than the prison issue stuff which, excluding soap, is vegan friendly. Canteen supplies are limited to the usual animal-tested junk, but I was allowed without drama a lovely, by Lush, order sent in. While this is good for those of us who can be bothered to go out of our way for this treat, it isn't yet a readily available option for alternatives to the animal-tested stuff on offer which most inmates will choose over the prison issue products.

Similarly there are a few vegan alternatives available through the canteen in the prisons I've been in lately, but staff at Winchester did agree to allow me to order from elsewhere just before I was moved out and I anticipate there won't be objections here, but this still provides no alternative for the majority

who would change their living habits from everything animal-based if the choice was before them.

For all the efforts of the VPSG, which are all the more impressive from an insider perspective, there is work needs doing to address the wider implications of limited choice if we are going to progress the vegan way.

Life is certainly easier in my opinion for proper vegans who demand to be catered for, but there is yet no desire to offer a better choice for everyone else.

At The Weare I was approached by catering staff who had been supplied with cook books and various other material by VPSG and asked to let them know what I wanted to eat. Because I was a "proper vegan" – in their view and keeping a record of the meals provided, they made an effort and gave me the required soya milk each week – 3½ litres.

My cell mate went vegan a week after he arrived, but because he was seen as a hanger-on he was given half the amount I got as did the other two vegans on the ship.

Removing the need to supply vegan supplement packs – peanut butter and so on – they prepared the most amazing fruit salads each evening with mixed nuts, pears, onion, tomatoes, cucumber, grated carrot, mushrooms, dried fruit, etc. Delicious!!

It doesn't send a positive image about the vegan diet that it needs to be supplemented with peanut butter and so on, though it has to be said it's these supplements that often attract others to the diet as they think they're getting something extra, but as The Weare proved by preparing a simple salad the supplements aren't necessary.

Keith Mann



## Prisoner Letters - Jan Lawrence

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*continued from front page*

good by comparison! I'm down to half a litre of non-fortified soya milk. At Bronzefield I used to get a daily bag of peanuts, a flapjack and a piece of fruit. I don't get that here. Lunch here is usually an uninspiring salad, dinner is pre-plated, usually rice with a few little bits of veg in it. Breakfast is two slices of white toast and some weird cereal!

Given that Bronzefield and Peterborough are sister prisons run by the same company they are worlds apart. I hear Heather is currently at Bronzefield for a short spell on remand. We just missed each other!

I have put in for a transfer to another prison further south as this is too far for my family to visit. I haven't heard anything yet. My tagging release date is 30th December – unfortunately just missing Christmas.

A probation officer at Bronzefield told me I would only do 28 days in prison with the remaining three months on tagging. I was delighted with this news, it meant I would be out well before Christmas. I wrote and told all my family and friends.

Then it turned out that apparently this information was incorrect and in fact I have to do two months, just over, inside with two months on tagging. You can imagine the disappointment! I'm still trying to argue the point but I think it's hopeless. You might as well bash your head against a brick wall!

I'm quite settled in to the regime now and sleeping better – I'm not used to a rock-hard single bed! It's very similar to being back at my old boarding school! I'm starting to go to the gym, may as well get fit while I'm stuck here time-wasting. Missing Gavin badly of course. He is my rock, so strong and calm. One in a million.

I've been getting loads of cards and letters from lots of people who've looked at the VPSG website. I'm in good spirits generally, trying to stay positive!

Both the doctors I've seen at the two prisons have agreed that my nutritional requirements as a vegan on a prison diet here will be compromised and both doctors have prescribed me a multi-vitamin and calcium supplement, which I keep asking for but it never materialised.

Today a nurse informed me it is not prison policy for prisoners to be given vitamins and I won't be getting them. (I'm now told a multi-vitamin is available via canteen.)

I am also concerned about the soya milk being non-fortified. I have asked about the possibility of getting some Marmite (for B12), the answer to that was "No". And what about iodine – the very poor diet I am on at the moment certainly doesn't contain any. Calcium is also a problem.

I thought Bronzefield was bad enough, but compared to this place

it was Claridges! The answer to every question you ask here is "No!". If I said snow was white they'd say no!

Most of the other women are drug addicts, many of them can't (or barely) read and write. Their priority is when is their next fix. They won't do vitamins but Methadone is lobbed out by the bucketful.

Even if I managed to get a pair of tweezers (unlikely!) I couldn't use them because I have no hand-mirror. The mirror on the wall in a dark corner of the cell looks as though it has been scoured with a Brillo pad, totally useless, and my eyesight is bad.

The toiletries are no problem. The toothpaste, deodorant and liquid soap are all vegan and cover all requirements.

Thankfully my sentence is relatively short (if I get tagging ok I will be doing nine weeks in total). It takes ages to get even the simplest thing sorted here.

The upside is it's a great way to lose weight! Maybe a certain amount of stress has been involved although I've felt quite calm throughout my ordeal.

Many thanks again for all your support and efforts, I know how difficult and frustrating it must be for you too.

Take care, all the best

Jan

## Editorial

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*continued from page 2*

and Karen who is already on board. Unfortunately Karen was thrown in the deep end helping out on the Prison Shop Project with Greta. But with a guiding hand from her, Karen has weaved her way through the documentation and is doing a great job. It has meant her recently often working into the early hours to meet her deadlines, but somehow she is

able to sound bright and cheerful at the start of the next day.

### **Struggling with prisons in the private sector**

In the last 11 years the majority of our work has been done with government run prisons, most of who have now heard of our work, the only exceptions are if a new Catering Manager arrives in between the prison news sheets we provide to

all prisons [lately due to the excessive amount of work not as many as we would have liked to provide]. However, when recommendations are made to individual prisons they are normally adopted, although the amount of time it takes to implement them often varies considerably.

*continued overleaf*

## Editorial

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### The private sector is another ball-game?

We are still struggling to discover how best to bring prisons in the private sector in line with government run establishments, as they run so differently. Greta has gained quite a lot of experience dealing with Rye Hill, the first private prison we ever dealt with while helping Dave, but when Jan Lawrence arrived at Bronzefield her workload was full and I had to try to tackle the prison myself.

It was like being back in 1994 before VPSG had ever been heard of; the staff appear to have a totally different attitude, an almost impersonal and business like approach and request everything in writing. However, firstly trying to get through to even the switchboard to find out who was responsible for what - was a nightmare in itself, and when I did get through I found the different departments always on answering machines, apparently all

being in constant meetings. However, even though 'everything is in writing' so far they haven't been too speedy in some of their responses.

### Gone home no-one available

Their switchboard operator arrives at 9am and finishes at 5pm when the switchboard closes. This means there is no access to anyone in Bronzefield out of office hours, which causes complications, for example when needing to speak to kitchen staff on a food issue regarding the lunchtime choice, access to them is delayed until the switchboard operator arrives.

### Xmas goodies Rye Hill vs Bronzefield

On a brighter note, I see from our records that Rye Hill have been reasonably receptive to some of our input and this year have even rang us to see if we can provide any xmas goodies for vegans! We are wondering if we will have any luck with vegan xmas items being accepted at Bronzefield – but need to work on that one?

### Prison shop project packs

In order to help our ongoing research, permission was obtained for all the prisoners [who agreed to be used as a test case during their detention in prison] to receive a box of samples to taste of some of the food items we have recommended for inclusion on the prison shop listing. The packs contained a variety of vegan products, amongst which were:

Braised tofu, nuts, dried fruit, chocolate or vanilla custard, biscuits, soya desserts, sesame snaps, various chocolate bars etc.

Each box varied according to the prisons rules and regulations [some do not allow tins or glass products]. I understand that the prisoners didn't find it hard to participate in this trial! I am now waiting for all the completed questionnaires they had to complete to receive them.

Jo-Ann

## Vegan Prisoners Support Group

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### STANDING ORDER FORM

PLEASE NOTE: Once you have completed the following standing order form, please return to VPSG, not your bank

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

Your Address \_\_\_\_\_

To The Manager

Name of Bank \_\_\_\_\_ Branch \_\_\_\_\_

Bank's Address ☐☐ ☐☐ ☐☐ \_\_\_\_\_

Bank's Sort Code  -  Bank Account Number \_\_\_\_\_

Please pay on the     /     /     and on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of every month until further notice, the sum of £   
for the credit of VEGAN PRISONERS SUPPORT GROUP.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

As we are a non-profit making organisation with no paid staff, we are on a very tight budget. Supporting the VPSG is important to enable continued support for animal rights prisoners who have risked their freedom for the benefit of their non-human relatives. All donations are directly ploughed back into helping vegan animal rights prisoners of conscience. A monthly donation of £1.00 (roughly 25 pence a week) will help ensure we stay in existence. Your support in this way is most vital and gratefully received.



# Vegan Prisoners Support Group

Newsletter, June 2006

## Prisoner Letters - Jonny Ablewhite

Hi,

Just a few notes to clarify my current predicament. They haven't cut our throats yet!

The Judge's indication of 12 years was based upon information

presented to him by the police and the CPS only. This was given in the form of a case summary and a "schedule" of events - a chronological diary of every 'criminal' action beginning with the 1999 liberation.

By inference I was tenuously implicated in virtually every action - to the point where it became tiresome to read my name, yet again! Such inference was often so transparent as to be laughable e.g. identified as "main protestor" (whatever that means - tallest? baldest?) at demos and therefore held responsible for damage done there 2 months later.

This specious information would have been presented to the jury and the inference it stirred up would have led to a guilty verdict - if I had chosen to go to trial. This is what my legal team insisted. This "schedule" (and the gamut of inferences it encouraged) were of course a massive and engineered untruth. But, let's not kid ourselves; the truth



was absolutely irrelevant in this case.

My mitigation on May 11th could go some way to stratify the case against me but I fear the Judge has already chosen to believe the vast wave of untruths.

I cannot stress enough how important such 'inferences' are in cases of this ilk. They act as mortar and turn unconnected,

nonsensical, irrelevant, inconclusive and flimsy circumstantial suggestion into seeming forensic proof!

Combine 'inference' with the outrageous change in the preconviction disclosure law, throw in masses of media-circus supposition and lies and inconsequential inference can - and clearly has - led to lengthy prison sentences. It is a travesty but a grim reality we must all heed. If I wasn't about to spend umpteen years in jail, I would be in cynical hysterics!

It was made absolutely clear to me by my barrister that if I didn't comply with a guilty plea then I would receive the maximum 14 years after trial, irrespective of the truth. The CPS had "bottlenecked" so much "evidence" during the preceding 6 months and finally released it to create deliberate time limitations.

Ultimately after the Judge's heinous indication, I was given one hour to consider my fate. The only logic my barrister could provide was that a guilty plea would spare me the full 14 years. Any attempt to vindicate my case through a trial was considered by him a hopeless task. My only hope then was that a guilty

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### In this issue:

- Letters from prisoners: Jonny Ablewhite, Dave Blenkinsop, Don Currie, Garfield Marcus Gabbard, Sarah Gisborne, Jo Mayo, Heather Nicholson, John Smith and Kerry Whitburn.
- VPSG News

## Prisoner Letters-Jo Mayo

Dear VPSG,

Thank you for your prompt and much appreciated help at such short notice after I had been sentenced late afternoon on 11th May for charges relating to the Newchurch Guinea Pig Campaign.

By the time I arrived at HMP Peterborough I had a vegan meal waiting for me and by the next day received your letter to let me know that I would be receiving your reception pack of toiletries. I received them safely thanks again for your support.



I have been informed that vegan products will now be available to me through the prison canteen list. As I haven't been in prison before and also because this is a private prison

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## Contact VPSG

### Postal Address:

BM 2107, London. WC1N 3XX.  
United Kingdom.

**Office/fax:** +44 (0)20 8292 8325

**Emergency Arrests:** 07984 733 008

**E-mail:** [info@vpsg.org](mailto:info@vpsg.org)

**Web:** <http://vpsg.org>

Disclaimer: The views in the VPSG newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor. Responsibility can not be taken for the accuracy of statements made by contributors or the verification of material sent to VPSG for inclusion in the newsletter.

# Editorial

The last few months have spun by with the work involved with new prisoners and the movement of prisoners already on our listing. This has meant that two of our projects have had to take back seats – the first the quarterly prison news sheet which we distribute to every prison and the other the prison shop project.

We are now starting work on both and are keeping our fingers crossed that the prison list doesn't suddenly grow after the 3rd July; when 7 more people are on trial at two different courts.

## Re: the Prison Shop Issue

Your help is needed urgently. Many of you will recollect that you assisted our efforts by writing to your MP a couple of years ago – it made such a difference all those MP's writing to the Minister of Prisons asking why vegans were still not offered equal opportunities – an issue we first highlighted in 1996!

The letters assisted us in having our recommendations accepted, but it seems to have come to a halt, as Aramark [the company who have the contract for the majority of prison shops] seem to be having problems

sourcing the products we have recommended, although we have informed them they are readily available for their purchase from Suma Wholefoods.

So we hope you will help us resolve this issue so that our prisoners have



*Jo-Ann, Roger, Sonia and Hella working away at a VPSG mailout*

the opportunities to be able to buy such items as a vegan bar of chocolate, biscuits, soya desserts etc., by completing the enclosed letter and sending it off to your MP.

Alternatively you could even use the information to write your letter in your own words. Please send us a copy of any replies you receive from your MP. Remember the prisoners have given their freedom and just a few minutes

of your time would make such a difference to their daily lives – all you need to find is an envelope and a stamp.

In the meantime, we continue to provide some of the items they would like to purchase in our monthly nutritional packs, but 'nice to have's' like chocolate are hard to include as they are not nutritional items.

If you would like to help us to continue to provide these please consider supporting Robin Lane's sponsored walk later this year [see article below].

## Thanks

Special thanks to Kathleen for her generous donation, to Laura for raising money at the Birmingham Gig and the many other supporters who

help keep our work afloat.

Thanks also to Roger, Sonia and Hella who help mail out the VPSG supporter's newsletter, and prison news sheet. And to Danuta and Philip for offering their valuable time in order to provide us with the artwork we needed help with. We have also had much appreciated help from Frank, with the prison shop issue.

News has just come in that around £500 was raised for VPSG from a benefit gig in Sheffield held on Saturday 17 June. Many thanks to Paul, Ami and others for their hard work.

Jo-Ann

## Sponsored Walk for VPSG

In early July, supporter Robin Lane will be walking around Brockwell Park five times to raise the money needed to pay for a stall at this year's London Vegan Festival.

The park, situated in South London, is quite large and it will take about four hours to complete the walk. Please send your sponsorship money directly to VPSG.

## Obituary - Gari Allen

It is with great sorrow that we write this tribute to Gari Allen of Coventry Animal Alliance who died suddenly on the 18th June. Gari was there with support for the VPSG when we first began and has been a consistent support throughout.

Gari has been a part of the Animal Rights movement for well over 20 years. He was a presence always there, be it on demos, stalls, meetings or festivals. He was also heavily involved in cat rescue, trapping & neutering. In the 1980s Gari was sentenced to 18 months in prison for his part in a raid on Unilever's vivisection laboratories in Bedfordshire.

Gari was a true friend to the animals and an inspiration to those who were lucky enough to have their lives touched by his. Our thoughts are with his loved ones.

The funeral will take place on Thursday 29th June at 2:30pm at Canley Crematorium, Cannon Hill Road, Coventry CV4 7DF.

It is an open service, so everyone is welcome. It has been requested that people do not send flowers though donations towards the funeral cost are greatly appreciated.

If you are able to send a donation please call 020 8854 4184 for details of where to send and who to make cheques payable to.

## Prisoner Letters - Don Currie

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I was arrested on the 26.3.06 and as soon as the VPSG heard, they contacted Reading Police Station to ensure that

my dietary needs were met. I went from getting vegan chilli and rice for breakfast, lunch and dinner to fresh fruit, fruit juice, vegetable samosas,

vegetable curry, bombay potatoes, dhal and rice. I also received olive oil soap, which was much needed as I was in the cells for four days.

On arrival at HMP Woodhill, the staff knew I was vegan. I arrived quite late, about 8.30pm and a meal of 3-bean pasta was waiting for me. This was due to the VPSG contacting the catering staff to let them know I was arriving. The difference this makes is difficult to explain, un-

less you are in the situation I found myself in.

The VPSG have been working closely with the catering manager and staff and I am being given a healthy vegan diet which is improving as dialogue continues.

I can't overstate the importance of the VPSG to myself and other vegan prisoners.

Many thanks Don

## Prisoner Letters - John Smith

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Dear All,

Firstly thank you to all at VPSG for all their work and also to all the people who have sent letters of support and money.

Secondly, my stay at HMP started in Birmingham last year. Cold and dirty is how I would describe Winson Green. A Victorian jail from 1850 or thereabouts, little association, little exercise, constantly having to choose between a phone call or a shower due to queues for both. They were the bad bits; the good bits were the first aid and the gym course.

I think the kitchens did make a genuine effort and I even managed to be allowed permission to receive vegan packs from the VPSG even getting some sweeties and pea protein in them. Well that was Birmingham.

The move to Nottingham was such a relief. That happened in March, the differences are incredible, clean cells, light, airy and a visits room that you could hear each other talk. Association is every evening for 2 hours, plenty of phones and showers, even time for a game of snooker.

Food is very good and again I have been given permission to have the vegan packs sent in which keep me

snacking constantly. Salads every other day, good ones at that. The seeds, nut and dried fruit the VPSG send into me reinforce my opinion that vegans in here have the best deal. The whole attitude from officers here is geared towards care and the catering officer has excelled all expectations. The gym is modern and well equipped with access every day.

The other inmates throughout the last 7½ months have been nothing other than 100% behind us.

Obviously the odd joke, but no hostility at all, in fact the opposite everyone wants to be our friends, something I'm sure the Daily Mail would be horrified to hear.

Oh yeah, the bad bits again – well it is jail, we're not here to enjoy ourselves. Being away from loved ones, especially my partner who has been a mountain during these times, even when the police were interfering with my visits and causing as much stress as they could. She has been an incredible person and continues to make this time so much easier.

Well thanks again everyone for your support, now I've got figs, dates and a cup of coffee lined up for watching Brave Heart.

Yours for the Animals.

John.

VPSG Comment:

HMP Birmingham has improved immensely since 1996 when Greg

Avery and Dave Callendar received the cold corn on the cob under the infamous Mr. Green [fortunately now long retired]. In fact the present catering manager has been assisting us in our efforts to ensure that vegans are offered equal opportunities. His input and ideas

will hopefully help us to continue to make advancements on the care of vegans.

HMP Nottingham, although still a Victorian building, has been fortunate enough to have been completely refurbished and has a different attitude overall to prisoner care as you have read.





# Prisoner Letters - Kerry Whitburn

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After a court appearance at Nottingham Crown Court, on March 6th 2006, I arrived at Nottingham prison.

As I had spent two short but unpleasant periods here, in 2004, I was quite apprehensive. But within two hours of arrival I gained a positive feeling that things had changed. There is now a BRAND NEW induction wing here, where we were placed after being processed in reception.

Even though we'd been in Birmingham prison for nearly six months, so weren't new prisoners, we were still treated in the same manner. We were given individual interviews, and were asked if we had any concerns or worries.

We were asked IMMEDIATELY what we hoped to do during our time here – work, education or both. This was a sure sign that, unlike Birmingham prison, we would not be shoved in a cell and forgotten about.

**As I had spent two short but unpleasant periods here, in 2004, I was quite apprehensive. But within two hours of arrival I gained a positive feeling that things had changed.**

I have to say that this manner has continued throughout, from the day we arrived until present. For somebody like me – I'm fairly shy and withdrawn with people I don't know, and have never been comfortable in prison – this was such a comfort. It helped ease all my concerns, and I realised I had no need for apprehension.

We have been treated with dignity and non-judgement. As I had other concerns, mainly the fact I missed my beautiful

soul-mate, Jo, so terribly AND I was facing a serious charge, the relaxed and fair attitude shown to us was such a bonus.

After a week here, we were put into a main wing. Although Nottingham prison is a Victorian prison, the Victorian wings have been closed, so this wing is fairly modern: proper windows at a level you can see out of, no daunting brickwork, and relatively bright and clean.

Our vegan requirements have NEVER been an issue. The vegan diet in here is the BEST I've experienced in ANY prison. It's tasty, varied, plentiful, and we get salad every day and as much fruit as we want.

We also receive a large vegan box every week, consisting of 15 soya milks; 7 packs of crisps; 4 vegan yoghurts; a jar of peanut butter; vegan biscuits, and lots of fruit and nuts. What does help, I feel, is the good relationship Jo-Ann has developed with the Catering Manager.

Before I go, may I thank everyone who has supported me so far. You're all truly appreciated. To those who I've not replied to recently, I apologise. But I hope you understand that I've not felt like writing. Finally, can I ask you ALL to give as much support to Jo, love of my life, to help her through. Thank you!

Good wishes to you all,

Kerry xxx

# Prisoner News - Garfield Marcus Gabbard

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Garfield experienced some problems initially finding the restrictive regime difficult at times. In particular he was concerned that his vegan diet would not be catered for. However, at HM Prison Hull there were other vegan prisoners and so we contacted the Catering Manager for a chat and asked if it would be possible for him to have a meeting with Garfield which he agreed to arrange.

However, no sooner had a favourable regime been established at Hull when, after sentencing to 21 months, he was within a week transferred to HM Prison Moorland.

On being informed of this move,

the VPSG were immediately 'on his case' and again contacted the Catering Manager, offering our help and forwarding him our vegan information pack.

There were some initial concerns because the prison had not had a vegan prisoner since 1999, and were understandably 'rusty' with what was an acceptable vegan diet.

However, these problems were soon sorted with the help of the Principal Officer who put in much effort to provide for Garfield, not hesitating to contact the VPSG to confirm the acceptability of certain food products, and seeking to set up a varied and balanced diet.

In fact, Garfield has said that he was a 'junk vegan', but he is now becoming a healthy vegan due to his conversion to salads, or 'rabbit food' as he puts it, which his very supportive partner Rachel has previously had some trouble persuading him to eat!

Garfield is looking forward to attending educational courses in creative writing and I.T. and also has the option of working in the kitchen. He appreciates all the efforts done by us on his behalf, and looks forward to his letters from supporters.

Audrey, VPSG Case Worker



# Prisoner Letters - Dave Blenkinsop

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## 5 Years and Counting

It's been 5 long years now and still no sign of getting out. The Parole Board didn't like the idea of releasing me as apparently I pose a risk to the public. But how can this be for presumably that risk will still be there when they have to release me in 18 months?

They work in the most mysterious of ways – the system is bursting to the brim yet they hold people longer than necessary and when I do get out I will be subjected to the most bizarre levels of monitoring which will exclude me from certain areas and certain people. This is the same level accorded to sex offenders and is reflective of paranoia and vilification for people like me. It's all unfounded of course, I pose no risk and have no intention of re-offending. The current political climate fuelled by public perception suggests that I will have to do the entirety of my time, meaning my release will probably be in January 2008.

The last 5 years have had their ups and downs. The despair of sharing a cell with 2 others at Bullingdon for weeks on end to the relative contentment of this place. Although things could be better, I know that I'd be happy to finish my sentence here at Rye Hill. The higher security prisons seem to be much easier and allow you to live in relative comfort and dignity. It is this lack of

dignity that hurts the most. Having to ask for everything rather than do it yourself, to rely upon others when you're more than capable yourself. It's not about what you have but a matter of what you are deprived of. The lack of provision to think for yourself is the most demeaning.

I only tend to eat salads for I have no faith in the kitchens to provide genuine vegan food. I have seen their interpretation of veganism and wasn't impressed. I place the blame with the numerous pseudo vegans which creates the impression that all vegans are similarly complacent.

I am grateful for the inroads made by the VPSG in this matter. Just as I am for the ongoing struggle to create a better canteen (shop) provision and am dismayed to learn that the Home Office has yet again delayed in recognising vegans as a significant minority.

As always I extend my thoughts to all those who have supported me through these last 5 years. Special gratitude goes to Jo-Ann and Greta who have always been there.

Regards

Dave x

## VPSG News - Greta

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On 16 June 2006 Jo-Ann and I attended a meeting at Rye Hill with the new kitchen manager. We were allowed to meet with Dave Blenkinsop before hand in order to agree on our agenda and Dave was permitted to attend the meeting in the kitchens that followed.

We feel the meeting was a huge success and has laid the foundations for great steps forward. We went in with a full agenda and managed to cover in depth all the issues we wished to raise, some of which were resolved there and then and others that have had targets agreed on. Regular fortnightly meetings are to take place within Rye Hill and it has been requested that the VPSG

have a presence every third meeting.

Dave had agreed to continue his invaluable support for our prison shop project and we have the full support of the kitchen manager, with regards to our nutritional needs study that Dave has agreed to also take part in.

As a result of the success of the visit the VPSG can confirm that we plan to make visits to prison kitchens standard practice. This places a heavy burden on time and resources, but we feel and hope that you, our supporters, will agree, and that results will prove it to be well worth our investment.

# Prisoner Letters - Sarah Gisbourne

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24/05/06

Hi to all VPSG and vegan prisoner supporters,

Thank you for supporting us in the past and in the future. The current climate will probably mean more vegan AR prisoners than ever before and with longer sentences given. This means VPSG will need all the help you can give both financially and hands-on.

I've now been in for 18 months and am feeling fit and healthy thanks to Jo-Ann and co. I've become addicted to the gym, including weights – I get very competitive and want to push and lift the heaviest weights so I need loads of the right sort of food. Jo-Ann still sends me tins of braised tofu which is lovely.

I now get a town visit once a month. I get to see my dear dog and friends.

Also to eat as much good vegan food as I can. So, I've no complaints and the time is still going quickly. My attitude is positive and I can see the home stretch. I'm due for parole Aug 2007.

Keep up the good work and support, we all truly appreciate it.

Keep up the fight!

Sarah

# Prisoner Letters - Heather Nicholson

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Dear VPSG supporters,

Yes I know in the last newsletter I said I wouldn't be here longer than the end of January and I'm still here. Devious tactics by the police and CPS have kept me here but that's another story. It shows we are being taken seriously though and we are achieving results.

I think I can speak for all AR prisoners that when we say thank you to VPSG supporters and Jo-Ann we mean it from the bottom of our hearts. As usual Jo-Ann and co. have worked miracles. Here at Bronzefield the food has improved enormously since I arrived. I have lots of salads with kidney beans, butter beans and beetroot sometimes garnished with onion as a treat.

VPSG provided sacks of brown rice, quinoa, millet and burger-mix for the kitchen staff to cook for me. It's

a great idea because it's so simple, costs the prison nothing and provides me with more nutritious food. Quite a few other prisoners have requested a vegan diet after they have seen my meals.

I can buy vegan goodies from my own canteen sheet which include miso soup, Organica hazelnut chocolate, toiletries and fruit and nut bars etc. I can order more toiletries from the Honesty catalogue now as well. I don't think even half of this would have been achieved without VPSG.

Although I am well fed I still dream of avocados and humus with grapes for dessert. It's strange how you so easily take so much for granted.

I am still completely overwhelmed by all the wonderful letters of support I receive. They come in faster than I can reply to them all. I always reply but some letters have been

known to go missing or have taken a few weeks to arrive, so please don't think I've not replied if you don't hear from me.

The support from prison officers, security guards in court, prisoners, etc. has been brilliant and heartening. I get on with everyone here but only on a superficial level. That's why the letters are so important. They are a vital connection with like-minded people.

I really feel that all the long-term prisoners are the ones to concentrate on and we must all keep writing to them over the years to come and make sure the support doesn't tail off.

I have so much admiration and gratitude for Jo-Ann and everyone at VPSG. They get results and are always so professional.

Please keep supporting VPSG and the prisoners. Together you and VPSG make the world of difference to AR prisoners' lives.

Thank you all.

Love, Heather xx

## VPSG News - Audrey

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I started working as a volunteer for the VPSG in January this year. I thought that I would be doing 'a bit of typing' to help out, but, with the volume of work now regrettably increasing, this soon turned into becoming a trainee caseworker.

I knew very little about the VPSG, other than they supported the health and hygiene requirements of vegan prisoners, although the details of how this was achieved I had no idea. I have been amazed at the infrastructure which Jo-Ann, its founder, has set up in the 12 years she has been running the VPSG, for many of them almost single-handedly.

There are contacts with so many different departments which run the prisons, but in particular with the catering department to ensure vegan food which meets nutritional requirements. You may recall the now legendary story of the cold 'corn on the cob' Christmas dinner

offering to a vegan prisoner. I am glad to report that matters have most definitely improved – indeed, one of the prisoners I am assisting was recently offered the best vegan pack we have seen so far!

I look forward to hearing from my cases and to resolving any problems they might be experiencing, and find it satisfying when reaching a positive solution. There are many challenges to be met, but I find working on these as beneficial to me as I hope they are to the prisoners.

Working with the other volunteers is very rewarding. Our small band of workers all have their different tasks, but all are 'cogs in the wheel' which help to keep the VPSG the successful support group it has become, and which I am privileged to be a part of!

Sincerely,  
Audrey

## Navajo Art

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Animal rights activist Lynda Korimboccus is the vegan artist behind Navajo Art &

Design and will shortly be contributing artwork to VPSG to support our work for animal rights prisoners of conscience, as well as becoming our Scottish VPSG contact.

Lynda accepts all kinds of artwork commissions including animal portraits, cards, logo and t-shirt design. She has pledged 10% of profits to VPSG from all orders received through this article. Please quote VPSG when you contact her by e-mailing [lynda@navajoart.co.uk](mailto:lynda@navajoart.co.uk) or calling 08454 082385.



# VPSG in Birmingham

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Support for the VPSG in Birmingham and the West Midlands is on the increase with more and more publicity, fundraising and general awareness happening over the last several months.

It began with a well organised and extremely well attended VPSG benefit gig that raised £400 and brought a lot of publicity to the organisation in Birmingham with over 100 people attending.

After helping out in a small part for the benefit gig with leaflets, advertising and the sale of benefit CDs and books, we decided that the

VPSG would be a good cause to give a small part of our time to, and so along with others in Birmingham are trying to continue the publicity and fundraising for the organisation.

The second event at which we publicised the VPSG was the Midlands Veggie BBQ and Fayre, hosted and arranged by the BVV (B'ham Veggies & Vegans).

There were a variety of stalls selling merchandise and supplying information including the Vegan Society, Redditch Vegetarians and Vegans, VIVA!, vegan cakes and aromatherapy massage as well as

many more. We put out a selection of information regarding the VPSG including goals and objectives, a specially printed newsletter, MP action letters, key contact details and prisoner lists as well as some general information about veganism and AR.

There was a lot of interest and it has resulted in even more people from the midlands wishing to support and help the VPSG with their very important work.

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## Prisoner Letters - Jonny Ablewhite

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*continued from front page*

plea with a "Basis of Plea" would leave me with some vindication. Yet the 'Basis of Plea' was rejected by the CPS, deliberately.

A "Basis of Plea" is an opportunity to outline the parameter of your "guilt" and you should be sentenced and judged accordingly. It would have restored dignity, halted the scapegoating process and detached me from being effectively sentenced for a whole host of actions I was clearly not responsible for, including the desecration.

This, however, would not have served the purposes of the Staffordshire police and the CPS. They would not have been able to conjure up and feed information about an all-encompassing "conspiracy" of mythological proportions to a salivating, voyeuristic and hysterical mass media. They know that such hysteria will off-set recent disasters involving animal tested medication.

So much of this has been purposeful. Here's why. The labelling and stereotyping of individuals as "leaders" of 'organised criminal networks' is a contrived political and semantic tool. It can be used to justify such 'umbrella' conspiracy charges and outrageous sentences. It can also

be used to 'infer' that these "leaders" are representative of the entire animal rights protest culture - by demonising one, you demonise all.

Compassionate protest and moral aims and arguments are then marginalised by the mass media from the public will and sentiment. This portrayal is then used to convince the public that all political and moral indignation is the habit of such 'extremist' networks.

The public can then be cajoled and dissuaded from speaking out or protesting themselves for fear of being similarly demonised. It is tacit but tactical indoctrination. How WE disrupt, interrupt and destabilise this process will be fundamental to our future success as moral activists within a mediascape of stereotypes and scaremongering.

None of the police involved in the inordinantly expensive police operations in Newchurch would admit the reality that there was NEVER an SNGP leadership hierarchy dictating and controlling "criminality".

Scattered bands of non-hierarchical, decentered, autonomous individuals clearly function outside of their own operational experience and logic. To admit this reality - that I cannot be held responsible for six years of action would be to admit

that there remains an untold sum of "unsolved crimes" in that area.

This is despite the millions of pounds of tax payers' money ploughed into their investigations. To admit that reality - that I was not the "controller" of "criminal activity" - would have deeply affected their case, their pride, their media intentions and their promotional opportunities. It would also mean such lengthy prison terms are wholly unjustifiable.

Yet the prospect of a long term sentence is clearly now a reality. But, of course, I have always used the true terror and pain of tortured animals as a comparative tool to measure how much I should complain - NOT MUCH! I am well fed (thanks to the VPSG) and the visits and letters from family, friends, Earth and Animal Rights activists have been inspirational. Thank you for your time and support.

### The Sentence

It is clear how Judge Pert had absolutely no interest in reality. All credit and all mitigation was ignored. The fact we categorically stated we had no involvement in the grave desecration was ignored. The appeals we made which led to the resolution

*continued overleaf*

## Prisoner Letters - Jonny Ablewhite

*continued from page 7*

were ignored and all facts about animal experimentation again were ignored.

March 16th 2005 is still relevant. We were in preparation to put up a symbolic banner concerning the Exclusion Zone granted by the injunction. That can be proven. To

suggest otherwise was clearly a convenient lie.

It is obvious Judge Pert's concluding speech was previously prepared and paid absolutely no heed to ANY of the mitigating circumstances.

Of course this court fiasco was a publicity stunt for a baying media mob. Of course their whole legal

fiasco has been manufactured. And of course we will appeal the Judge's decision!

Thank you to all those who attended court and gave us the strength of many. You're all fekin' fantastic!

For Bill Rogers and Betty Wang;  
For the Animals, for their Earth,  
Jonny

## Prisoner Letters - Jo Mayo

*continued from front page*

I was unsure what to expect. I have to say though that they have been very helpful and are now providing me with a very good vegan diet [once again due to receiving advice from VPSG].

This is a brand new private prison only about 12 months old therefore, I don't know if it is typical of most prisons, but I am hoping my time will pass relatively quickly as there is plenty to keep me occupied; such as gym facilities, volley ball, bad-

minton and aerobics, NVQ training in vocational subjects, in-house workshops, access to a library and I even have a t.v. in a nice clean single cell!

The other inmates on my wing are friendly and the guards pleasant and professional. There is also a very strong anti-bullying system in place. Obviously I miss my boyfriend Kerry and friends and family enormously, but am entitled to visits each week and although it is a distance for friends and family to travel I have decided not to try for a

transfer to a more local prison at the moment as it is clean, well run and not what I expected of prison at all.

Thanks again for all your help.

I would also like to send a massive thank you to all the people who have sent me cards and letters. The support I have been receiving has been overwhelming and I am very grateful to everyone who has written in to me.

Jo.  
June 06

## Vegan Prisoners Support Group

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### STANDING ORDER FORM

PLEASE NOTE: Once you have completed the following standing order form, please return to VPSG, not your bank

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

Your Address \_\_\_\_\_

To The Manager

Name of Bank \_\_\_\_\_ Branch \_\_\_\_\_

Bank's Address \_\_\_\_\_

Bank's Sort Code   -   -   Bank Account Number \_\_\_\_\_

Please pay on the  /  /  and on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of every month until further notice, the sum of £   
for the credit of VEGAN PRISONERS SUPPORT GROUP.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

As we are a non-profit making organisation with no paid staff, we are on a very tight budget. Supporting the VPSG is important to enable continued support for animal rights prisoners who have risked their freedom for the benefit of their non-human relatives. All donations are directly ploughed back into helping vegan animal rights prisoners of conscience. A monthly donation of £1.00 (roughly 25 pence a week) will help ensure we stay in existence. Your support in this way is most vital and gratefully received.



# Vegan Prisoners Support Group

December 2006

Disclaimer: The views in the VPSG newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor. Responsibility can not be taken for the accuracy of statements made by contributors or the verification of material sent to VPSG for inclusion in the newsletter.

## Prisoner Letters – Joseph Harris

Getting sentenced to 3 years in prison was a bit of a shock, but I've fairly quickly settled into prison life. I'd been looking down the barrel of a custodial sentence for the 8 months since my arrest and so I'd had plenty of time to talk to the VPSG and former prisoners and to mentally prepare myself.

Everyone says it, but it's true that the fear of coming here was so much worse than the reality, even for a geeky scientist - the worst thing that's happened is having my accent compared to Hugh Grant's! In fact other prisoners have been very supportive and the doors on the wing were banging in solidarity when I unwittingly featured on the news.

After a few initial problems the VPSG helped me to get my vegan diet fully sorted out. I'm now getting a good selection of food with a weekly supply of soya milk, nuts, seeds and dried fruit....the only issue I have is that I never, ever want to see another boiled potato again!

I'm making good use of my time, toning my scrawny vegan physique in the gym, doing education classes, reading (currently 'Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee' - a true classic), teaching myself Spanish (hable un poquito de

español) and replying to all the lovely letters I've been getting. On top of this I've been lucky enough to have a few brief chats with Don Currie, who's also imprisoned here, and it's been great being able to share experiences with another vegan prisoner.

I'm due to be shipped off to another prison soon, but the VPSG as always have been fabulous and have already contacted my potential destination to inform them of my arrival.

I'd like to send a massive thank you to everyone who has written to me, it means a lot and makes this situation a lot easier to bear. Also a huge thank you to my friends, family, my amazing girlfriend and of course, the VPSG.

Please support their 'Write to Your MP' campaign to help improve prison shops, an issue of particular importance for vegan prisoners here at HMP Woodhill. \*

Keep those letters coming - I try to reply to everyone ☺.

Take care, love Dr Joe x.

*\* Joe Harris has since been moved to HMP Lewes.*

## Prisoner Letters – Garfield Marcus Gabbard

As the first vegan in this jail for several years and the only one here at present it's been frustrating sometimes, but I must say the diet is above average - I get brown rice daily, soya desserts at weekends and the meals in general are a good effort. A million thanks to the VPSG for their help and support.

I have passed a number of exams and I am now doing an Open University course in creative writing. I have progressed and become stronger for my experience and await the Home Office to decide whether to release me on parole in March 2007, if not I'll have to wait to January 2008 for freedom. I am now an enhanced prisoner and surviving better than I ever thought I would.

Whatever you are doing for the animals keep on fighting for the voiceless but try not to be a martyr. Please keep in touch with prisoners as your moral support is invaluable - post is the highlight of my day. I thank you all for your advice, help, letters, cards and moral support. Respect and hugs to you all, you make me feel very humbled. Take care and stay free.

Until all are free. Garfield.

## Prisoner Letters Sarah Gisborne

Dear VPSG and Supporters

The Cookham Wood up-date from this vegan is that things are progressing. Healthcare are now starting to provide strict vegans with the VEG1 supplement after intervention from the Catering Manager and the other 'so called vegans' are having their diet looked at; meaning they take the soya milk as well as the dairy milk etc - this has now stopped.

The VPSG have also supplied me with a Vit C Supplement as I was getting flu and colds. They also can now send me nice parcels containing vegan chocolate bars and when they arrive it always feels like Christmas and yes I do pace myself with the goodies.

Even though there are quite a number of us in prison at present the support from the VPSG has continued and they are still always there when needed. All I have to do is phone them regarding an issue in prison and they try to sort it. They are such a lifeline and they should never be taken for granted.

I am still training hard in the gym and feeling very positive and strong of mind.

Your support for me has been fantastic. Please continue to support the VPSG as we need them.

Long may you and they reign.

Sarah

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## Editorial

The increase in prisoners has certainly kept volunteers busy these last few months, but we are concerned with the forthcoming 'so-called' Festive Season and New Year approaching, that it could be a grim time for some vegan prisoners.

In our last newsletter we asked for your help to resolve this by writing to your MP – unfortunately there is still not even a bar of vegan chocolate, a moisturiser, hair conditioner, etc., on canteen sheets and not all prisons permit us to send in nutritional parcels. So when you next purchase your vegan goodies – please spare a thought that without your help prisoners can't do the same.

The prisoners are writing to their MP's, but they REALLY need you to write to your MP too as the Prison Service continue to drag their heels in implementing our recommendations. So if you want to help them make a difference - please sign the enclosed letter and forward it to your MP if you haven't already done so.

Thanks Jo-Ann

## Prisoner Letters Jonny Ablewhite

Dear Friends

I finally have to admit defeat – the continual flow of heartfelt letters means I just can't avoid this anymore! Typing up 'collective' letters really is frowned upon, but I felt I was neglecting my letter writing responsibilities so it became unavoidable – forgive me, you beautiful creatures!! You shall be rewarded in Vegan heaven!

I've finished my Master's degree exams – yes, I may seem a little proud but I am inwardly smiling that I've managed to plough on with this course in these trying circumstances. If I pass these I can begin reading for the thesis that should conclude the Masters in Social Sciences by the end of next year – hopefully.

The simple but effective combination of both mental and physical exercise and stimulation really has assisted this prison journey so far. I have a stoical soul but the regular gym and studying I have been afforded has been indispensable in relieving any complaints.

## Prisoner Letters – Josephine Mayo

Dear VPSG

Thanks again for all your hard work since I was transferred from Peterborough to Drake Hall and for also ensuring all my vegan needs were met while I was at Peterborough.

Unfortunately even though the food is fine here, I only have limited access to vegan toiletries so thanks for sending them in to me until you get it finally sorted with Prison HQ. In the meantime, your help has been invaluable.

Being in a semi open prison this place is obviously very different to Peterborough as I have more freedom.

The women are friendly here and I'm on a nice quiet house so can do my O.U Study at night without

interruptions. I have also been keeping very busy in the daytime.

Whilst I'm here I intend making full use of all the available education courses. I've also got a job in the gardens which I'm really enjoying as I love being outdoors.

Thanks to all the supporters who have been kind enough to write to me. I really appreciate it. I obviously miss my wonderful boyfriend Kerry very much, but have had some inter-prison phone calls with him which are the highlight of each month. I am told my inter-prison visit is now being processed.

Thanks again VPSG for all your help.

Jo Mayo

## Prisoner Letters – Don Currie

Dear VPSG

I am well both in mind and body. I can't compete with Natasha, she's in Nirvana, but things are good here in Woodhill.

Jo-Ann and the VPSG have worked tirelessly on my behalf and I feel we are getting somewhere at last. I am now getting seeds as well as nuts and dried fruit. It seems vegans are all a bit obsessed with food, I'm looking at a long time in prison, yet all I'm concerned with is food. I wonder what the psychiatrist will make of that?

I met Joe a few times before he was transferred, we did some training together and managed to cycle 20km in 40 minutes and natter away at the

same time. Not easily done, especially as most of our conversation was about food!

I am playing chess, table tennis and going to the gym and also doing yoga and going to education five days a week.

I wish to use this opportunity to thank the VPSG and all those who support this organisation.

I would also like to thank all the people who have taken the time to write to me.

Love Don

But I won't lie; there are times when I want to crumple because I can't sit on the grass with my family or laugh in a bar with my friends – but then I see the pile of letters you send and it genuinely, poignantly, reminds me that hope is an exquisite and eternal thing. Thank you for them and for your incredible generosity. A special 'thank you' to the VPSG of course!

We have, somehow, landed in a prison that seems to be pioneering

a laissez-faire attitude to retributive punishment; not what you'd expect from Blair's post-colonial tyranny! Many aspects of this prison are inefficient and inhumane, but the regime is wholly bearable. We are only locked up from 9pm weekdays and from 6pm weekends.

The 50 or so lads I share my days with on C wing are mellow and often

*continued on the back page*

## Prisoner Letters – Kerry Whitburn

Hello everyone. Hope all is well. Things are just ticking over here in Lowdham Grange. I'm still a journalist on the prison magazine, and the very first edition of Lowdham's 'SYSTEM-ATTIC' is due at the printers. Should be out for Christmas. I must say that while working on this magazine I have had the privilege of working alongside some of the more pleasant and amicable prisoners in here.

Talking of journalists, one of them recently printed a scathing article about two of us, he claimed we were bragging about Lowdham Grange being a holiday camp, and that I was bragging about receiving inter-prison visits with Jo.

Any of you who read our last letters to the VPSG (where the journalist claimed to have gained his information) will know this is not true – for a start, I mentioned that I'm *hoping* for an inter-prison visit with Jo, as I adore her and miss her terribly, but even though Jo is six months into her sentence, and I'm fourteen months in, we have NOT yet had an inter-prison visit. It's looking less likely we will receive one in the near future due to prison overcrowding and low staffing levels. Also, none of us has ever claimed Lowdham Grange is a holiday camp, what was actually said was on the lines of Lowdham being "likened to a holiday camp" but that it depends on your "experiences of a holiday camp".

What does prison mean to me? I HATE being in prison, as prison to me is not solely about the high concrete wall topped with barbed wire; and the

internal high fences topped with barbed wire too; and the bars on the windows; and the heavy, steel doors or people shouting etc. Prison to me is mainly about being AWAY from my life, love and everyone in it, away from Jo, my beautiful dog Karma, and my friends.

Unlike most of the prison population I keep my head down and get on with my time. I don't whinge, but make the best out of a dire situation. I try to fit as much as I can into my week, breaking the monotony while participating in courses I hope will benefit me after my eventual release.

As well as working on the prison magazine, I'm still enjoying the Learning Support Assistant course. I'm now about to begin unit 4, a unit based on Maths. I've just completed the Literacy unit, and after unit 4 we've got unit 5 to complete. This is based on E.S.O.L, and is the final unit of the course. Upon completion I will be qualified to work with adult learners, in prison and outside. As well as this, I do one afternoon a week in a creative writing class, where we're taught about writing stories and poems. So everything to do with my time is geared up to help me in the future. It also helps alleviate the boredom of prison, as well as the many hours of loneliness.

How do I view Lowdham Grange? As a prison where the staff treat us as HUMAN BEINGS, with a NAME, not a NUMBER. A prison that offers opportunities for those who want them: be it earning money or gaining

education. As above, I'm doing a course that could benefit me as well as others when I qualify as an L.S.A. I'm gaining experience in journalism at a level I could use, outside, by working with ethical people on ethical newspapers/magazines.

This is a prison that recognises and adapts to every prisoner's individual needs, be it race, religion or belief. When we arrived here there were virtually no vegan provisions, but now a full separate vegan menu and a Special Shop Order form to purchase vegan products, from toiletries to washing powder chocolate to nuts.

The vegan products are available for every prisoner to buy, not just vegans....spreading the word eh!

So, Lowdham Grange is NOT a holiday camp after all – it's a prison! But it's a prison that does its best to teach dignity and respect by example, whilst also offering rehabilitation opportunities. Isn't this what society wants – people leaving prison respectful, dignified and rehabilitated?

Anyway, I want to end by saying a HUGE THANK YOU to all of you who have supported me and Jo; and I apologise to ANYONE whose letter I may not have replied to. PLEASE, also, keep up your support of the VPSG – without them I would be living on salads!

MUCH LOVE AND BIG HUGS TO YOU ALL – KERRY. X

## Prisoner Letters – Natasha Avery

Hi everybody

Life continues apace at Whacky Towers. There seem to be more and more mad people turning up – must be the Christmas rush. One who particularly stands out, in more ways than one, is Mrs Bimbo with huge fake breasts (three thousand pounds including flights and accommodation in Thailand as she keeps telling everyone. What a bargain eh? Bet you're all going to rush off and get yourself a pair). She keeps insisting that she knows me from somewhere and has seen me pole-dancing in a club in Birmingham (of all places – no offence Kerry).

Another new one on the spur [*new*

*term for wing*] is 100% doolally & keeps everyone awake all night screaming and kicking her door. She has a horrible predilection for wearing clothes that are totally see-through – a truly hideous sight – and ankle bracelets made out of dangly bits of Jeye cloth, very fetching.

I have now got a job as a gym orderly which means I clean the gym for an hour in the morning and then work out the rest of the day, which is my idea of heaven. I've lost 20 lbs (12 stone 1 to 10 stone 9) so no more Mrs Fatso. I'm getting pretty fit now and starting to cover decent distances eg cycling 15 miles, rowing 10,000 metres & running 3 miles at 7 mph. I passed all my exams & am

now a fully qualified Assistant Gym Instructor. I hope you're all suitably impressed.

I also do gym inductions for all the new people – time for more whacky behaviour as pretty much all of them are high as kites when they come in. You turn around and they have got the boxing gloves on trying to knock each other out, or are swinging bits of chain off the machinery at each other's heads.

I have been here four months now & time has flown by. My tagging eligibility date is the 25<sup>th</sup> of November, but whether I get it or not

*continued overleaf*

## VPSG News – Audrey

Over the last few months we have been kept busy helping with the needs of the increased prisoners and our various campaigns. The prison shop and the lack of provision of vegan products has been a long running problem which we have spent many frustrating hours trying to resolve. We are positive that we are gaining ground, and hope that this issue will be resolved in the near future with your help – see enclosed letter to MP's.

Attendance at the Catering Conference provided a very interesting insight into the management of vegan meals in prison. We were very pleased with the response from the numerous Catering Managers who came to our table to obtain further information to help them with vegan catering. We are reliably informed by appreciative inmates that our input has significantly improved the vegan diet in most of the prisons. There was also an enthusiastic reaction to our forthcoming cookbook, which will contain menus sent in from the various establishments.

There have been several prison visits where we have met with individual test-cases and have sought to rectify any outstanding issues with the vegan diet, and are pleased to report that this has given some much needed stimulus and helped to obtain a positive outcome.

We continue to liaise closely with the Vegan Society who have been very helpful with our research, and who provide the 'VEG1' supplement which we send to our test cases at cost price. Overall, although there is more work needed still to provide our test-cases with their rightful equal opportunities, we are still very pleased that this year has been so constructive.

Audrey/VPSG Caseworker

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## Prisoner Letters – Natasha Avery

*continued from previous page*

is anyone's guess. Otherwise my release date is the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, so either way not long now. The support has been truly wonderful from the movement worldwide and especially from my husband Gregg who has given me the love and inspiration to do this sentence standing on my head, as have other prisoners who are doing or facing far longer than I am.

The vegan food at Bronzefield is good and almost more importantly

## News - Arrests

**24-hour emergency arrest line  
07984 733008**

Our current research shows the following ambient meals are suitable for vegans:

- Bunzl Vegetable Chilli
- Bunzl Pilau Rice
- Westlars Vegetable Chilli

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## Prisoner Letters –Jonny Ablewhite

*continued from page 2*

hilarious and, from the horse's mouth, 99.9% are here because of drugs related offences. It is clearly a pandemic problem the government has little chance of tackling. But, if drugs or drug-debts don't get in the way, they are all congenial – a consequence of their life and prison experiences. We all just want to get along and get out!

The appeal won't begin for a few months. I have little hope though. The State's judicial system is so completely entrenched in institutional and hegemonic immorality it pains me to think I will have to stand before them and be ignored again. I have thankfully managed to replace my legal team; they were so ineffectual in presenting my case I couldn't bear to let them loose on my appeal!. Please keep fingers, toes and knees crossed that it will be to some avail.

I have a great job on the prison magazine team: I proof read, spell check and edit – in keeping with my background strutting around classrooms!

they are receptive to suggestions from VPSG & from me, and actually act on them. I now get lots of veg and lots of salads too. The monthly nutritional packs from VPSG containing nuts, dried fruit, seeds, seaweed etc are wonderful & ensure a balanced diet. We prisoners nowadays are reaping the rewards of almost 13 years of commitment, perseverance & a lot of hard work by Jo-Ann & the VPSG team, & believe us we are suitably grateful! Love  
Natasha x

[5<sup>th</sup> Dec – still waiting for news on tagging]

- Westlars Pilau Rice.

St Aldates and Abingdon police stations in Oxford are participating in our scheme to provide soya milk to vegans detained in custody - we need volunteers from Oxford who can purchase (cost refunded) and deliver packs of soya milk to those stations as and when necessary....please contact Karen on 07984 733008 if you can help.

I've also been asked to help teach a film studies course and I'm learning Spanish and German so I'm over the moon! I sing/howl in the prison band and we trash out rather naff versions of Pixies or Neil Young classics twice a week. We performed in front of an audience last week, with some hip-hop and R&B improvisation – it was a complete belly-aching laugh! We opened with The Velvet Underground's 'Heroin'!

And, of course, I read a lot. Of note is virtually everything by Noam Chomsky and Jacky Law's *Big Pharma* – when read with a critical eye it can give great insight into the murky world of the pharma giants.

There are 5 or 6 of us who meet weekly for a 'Philosophy' discussion on a Wednesday morning. We set this weary world to rights, rant and battle with clashing theories and opinions; it's great! We've been encouraged by recent libertarian struggles in Venezuela and Mexico. I just crave the occasional cool cider and more Vegan allies! But there is such an uplifting, heterogenic multicultural mix of people here with an eclectic jumble of stories and wisdoms – each trying to maintain rationality and some self-esteem for themselves and their families, here and abroad.

Visits are of course a redemptive blessing. So can I thank everyone for taking the time to see me, for filling my weekends with such hilarity! I thank you all dearly for writing too – from the heart of my bottom!! But I thank you most for your Veganism; for the unflinching personal dignity and compassion for animals it provides in these tyrannous times – for this gives me unfaltering strength and hope.

Yours Always For the Animals, For  
Their Earth.

Jonny



# Vegan Prisoners Support Group

Newsletter March 2007

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## Prisoner Letters – Kerry Whitburn

Hello everyone, I hope you're well. When I was asked to write a letter for this VPSG update I thought 'What do I write about? Not much has changed since I last wrote'. I'm STILL awaiting an inter-prison visit with my beautiful soul-mate, Jo, whom I miss like mad and ALWAYS will; I'm STILL doing my Learning Support Assistant course/job; I'm STILL working on the prison magazine; I'm STILL doing the 'creative writing' and we're STILL waiting for an appeal date. So, just WHAT do I write about? Then I thought 'Hang on, I'll write about the VPSG for a change'.

It's fantastic that YOU ALL support VPSG, without them I have NO doubt vegan prisoners would be living on a diet of salads and cold vegetables, washing in just water whilst using salt to brush our teeth. That may sound exaggerated but just ask vegan/animal rights prisoners pre-VPSG! When we arrived here this prison had PITIFUL provisions for vegans; soya milk that was known only to dairy intolerants, and the vegan option on the menu was salad or 'something' with 'cheese' on! It's no coincidence that within a couple of months of us arriving the menu was updated to include a HOT

vegan option for EVERY meal, and the prison shop began stocking a wide range of vegan provisions, using SUMA as its supplier. This was achieved partly from us 'nagging' and also because staff here DOES listen; but also because of the input that VPSG put in on our behalf in their frequent discussions. Let's be honest, it is SO easy to become 'lost' within a prison system and not necessarily intentionally. I am one of nearly 600 prisoners and it could've been easily forgotten that I have vegan requirements. But when you have people such as VPSG (I never view it as an organisation but a group of kind and dedicated individuals who give up their own time to help the likes of ME) looking out for you, then you KNOW everything WILL be sorted. Even when attempting to sort out a 'vegan' related problem myself, to avoid dropping more work onto VPSG and increasing their ever-growing load, I feel confident to do so knowing the VPSG will be my 'trump card'. There have been many times, in various prisons, where I've been getting nowhere when attempting to sort out a simple problem concerning my basic vegan needs so I've said (unashamedly too!) 'OK, I'll contact VPSG and ask them to

explain my problem to you, as you obviously don't understand me'. The 'problem' has been sorted by the very next day!

This is only possible due to the reputation of VPSG within the prison system; a reputation built by hard work, time and effort put into care and support for the likes of ME by volunteers at VPSG. VPSG volunteers work does not stop within a few days of making sure a new prisoner's needs are met. NO, this is just a small part of their work; along with all the research into EVERY police station, EVERY court and EVERY prison to find out IF they are meeting the EVERY need of vegans. Are vegans being fed correctly? Are the blankets in police stations non-woollen? Are vegan toiletries, chocolate, washing powder etc sold in prison shops? Do the 'establishments' in question actually know what veganism is? The list could go on and on, which is why I hope VPSG goes on and on. To be able to do this VPSG needs YOUR precious and valuable support to go on and on.

Before I go I MUST say a massive 'THANK YOU' to everyone who has written, sent money, stamps etc during this sentence. Your support IS so greatly appreciated.

Until next time.....take care, and live life positively and carefully.

Love and hugs, Kerry

## Prisoner Letters – Don Currie

Dear All,

I've had quite a year already. I am now a B Cat prisoner which is a step in the right direction. I'm doing a plastering course and I've just started an OU in humanities. I won't bore you with my daily routine.

I am fortunate enough to be in a prison that has a kitchen that is willing to make an effort and accepts input from the VPSG on the vegan diet. I am now receiving mixed seeds with cranberries and I also get lots of fruit. I also hear that brown rice and sunflower seeds are on their way, courtesy of the VPSG, as part of their study of the health of vegans in prison.

One of the highlights of my day is my bowl of porridge, an obsession of mine, it could be worse I know someone who has a problem with mushrooms, I digress, I mix my seeds and cranberries in and my moment is made complete! Back to reality.

The VPSG are working on herbal remedies and toiletries and things are improving thanks to everyone's efforts. I am still getting lots of mail and gifts, reading and answering letters has become part of my life. Whitemoor is a Cat A prison but I've more freedom here than I had at Woodhill.

A big thank you to everyone that has been there for me. Love, Don

### STOP PRESS

On the 6.3.08 the following received sentences in connection with the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act [2005]

**Mark Taylor - 4 years**  
**Suzanne Taylor - 2 1/2 years**  
**Teresa Portwine - 15 months**

For details of supporting these and other prisoners please see the enclosed Prisoner Information Sheet.

### In this issue:

#### Letters from prisoners

Latest news from our prisoners.

#### Powercake Recipe

John Smith provides a power pudding.

#### Appeal for Funds

An upsurge in vegan prisoner numbers is straining VPSG finances.

#### Prison Shop Issue

Our prisoners need your help to obtain vegan products.

# Editorial

## High prisoner numbers

As we go to print we have three new prisoners and possibly another joining them within the next week or so, making this one of the busiest times we've ever experienced.

However, on a brighter side Garfield Gabbard was released on the 7<sup>th</sup> March.

## Here we go again...

The day of Mark, Suzanne and Trish's sentencing at the Old Bailey, Audrey and I were standing by in the office waiting to receive a call from Lewis, who was at the court to alert us to the outcome. When we received the bad news, our – sadly – well practised routine was put into place.

Immediately we received the news Audrey and I sprung into action, firstly by contacting the People Escort Courier Services to check Mark, Suzanne and Trish were all being taken to the prisons we believed to be their destination. Once this was established we started making our calls to the kitchens to make sure there would be a meal waiting for them on their arrival and then to the Reception Areas to make sure they had access to suitable hygiene products.

The next couple of hours made us both realise that although VPSG will have been in existence for thirteen years this April and how much you feel you have planned for the possible arrival of new prisoners, there can always be last minute unforeseen problems which need sorting out.

Audrey was advised that HMP Belmarsh kitchens were well organised, but Reception informed her that the prison issue toiletries had run out of vegan toothpaste, so she quickly made arrangements for emergency supplies of toothpaste and soap to be despatched for Mark's use.

At HMP Holloway I was experiencing problems getting through to the kitchens and when I finally got an answer I discovered the regular Catering Manager was on leave and that they were in the middle of moving premises. I got the impression that the Catering Information Pack we have provided to every prison had gone missing in all the chaos, and I had my doubts everything was running smoothly – SO I felt a call to the Governor's Office was required. The speed the prison staff acted was impressive – they requested up-to-date

information be e-mailed to them which was then taken down immediately to the kitchens where their dietary requirements were being arranged.

We can only now wait until we receive replies from our contact letter to see what other help they need.

In the meantime, this has highlighted the importance of updating and reissuing our Catering Information Pack as it was last done in 2003 and is very out of date regarding nutritional requirements – we have also been busy compiling our cookbook 'Cooking Behind Bars' in order to give kitchens an idea of what they can cook to vary the vegan option – so here it comes – to do this to make sure our prisoners are fed properly – we need funds and hope that if you can help you will.

Jo-Ann

## STILL NO VEGAN CHOCOLATE FOR SALE

Although a number of supporters have already written to their MPs there are still some MPs who are not aware of the lack of opportunities for vegans in their prison shop.

Some prisoners serve their whole sentence without being able to buy a simple bar of vegan chocolate or other such treats, so if you haven't got around to writing please consider helping to resolve this issue – at the moment we are stuck in deadlock with the Prison Service and need some help to get this issue resolved. A sample letter is on our website [www.vpsg.org](http://www.vpsg.org) or write to us enclosing an sae and a standard letter will be sent to you. Thanks.

## Power Cake by John Smith

[included in 'Cooking Behind Bars' which we plan to distribute to prisons when completed]

### Serves 4

#### Ingredients

3 bananas  
2oz [50g] flour  
¾ - 1L soya milk  
3½ oz [100g] creamed coconut  
9oz [250g] stoned chopped dates/sultanas

1. Blend the bananas, flour, soya milk and creamed coconut together
2. Stir in the chopped dates or sultanas
3. Pour into a greased tray and cook at 120C/240F/Gas 1 for 1½ - 1hrs

## Josephine Mayo

Dear VPSG,

Thank you so much for your help as regards my vegan needs in prison. Unfortunately although I have good food in here I still have no access to vegan toiletries even despite your best efforts an ordering system still isn't in place. I really can't thank you enough for continuing to work on my behalf to make sure I get access to what I need and for sending in my Honesty order in the meantime.

I understand you are in the middle of more talks with the Prison Service to make sure vegans are better catered for in general on the weekly canteen service. I really don't know how your volunteers are managing to cope as they must be really busy at the moment, there are I'm told a rising number of vegans in prison and more on the way. Not only will this obviously mean your volunteers are working long hours, but this situation must also be impacting on your finances. I'm so grateful to everyone who supports VPSG and helps fundraise, we would be lost without their help as we would not have even our basic needs catered for.

As regards my situation, in general nothing much changes on a day to day basis. I'm still doing a fair few educational courses in the daytime. I finish my two distance learning courses soon but hope to start something else as I like to keep my brain active at night. I'm still working in the gardens and enjoying that. I've also joined a 'healthy living' course in the mornings. This is basically exercise classes before work. I intended losing some weight as with a good vegan diet and exercise regime I had visions of looking fit and toned within a few months. Unfortunately two months in and I haven't lost an ounce, all I've gained is a grumpy look when I haul myself out of bed and trot off to aerobics classes at 8 am of a morning. I'm still missing my awesome boyfriend Kerry, but have regular contact with him in letters and long interprison phone calls on a monthly basis.

I had a huge number of Christmas cards but had a few personal upsets in the New Year so I didn't manage to reply to them all. I'm really grateful to everyone that wrote to me though. I was also deluged with birthday cards which was a lovely surprise and once again I can't thank people enough for thinking of me.

Again, thanks to all at VPSG and thank you to all who support this vital organisation. Jo x

## Prisoner Letters – Madeline Buckler

Hello Everyone,

I have probably ended up at one of the best prisons in the whole country for vegan food. Although Peterborough tried, the food there doesn't compare to the alternatives provided here. Soya milk is used extensively so that there is nearly always an alternative to the vegetarian meal. But most of the time the veggie meal is vegan. The best part is the pack-ups at the weekend where we are provided with salad, bread, vegan cheese, fruit spread or peanut butter, soya yoghurt, fruit, crisps, fruit and nut mix and Organica coconut bars or hazelnut nougat bars. Oh yes and bourbons. So you can see we're not left hungry. I have heard that some people say they're vegan just for the packs at the weekend! Well it certainly shows that vegans aren't deprived.

Although there are about 10 vegans here, as far as I know I am the only strict, ethical vegan. I have had to bring up a few issues while I have been here. A couple of mistakes when issuing vegan options, cross-contamination and under-issuing of soya milk. Thanks to the

VPSG and co-operation of catering staff any issues have been dealt with quickly.

I have also been able to order from Honesty Cosmetics while I have been here. Although last time it took me a while, I am pretty sure that this time it will be a lot quicker thanks to VPSG.

VPSG make our lives so much easier and they need your support. As well as this newsletter they are also working on the Catering Information Packs which they provide to every prison as we never know where we will be transferred to at a moments notice and the information needs to be in place ready for our arrival. They also have many other projects they are working on to improve things in prison and they all cost money – if it isn't there progress slows down.

When I heard I was to be transferred to here from HMP Peterborough I was very worried about the food situation. I really didn't want to face a battle at mealtimes and I have been very lucky in that respect as VPSG had a long discussion with them before I arrived. But there are so many prisons that need to make the

same progress. That will only happen through the work of the VPSG.

I am hugely grateful for all the work the VPSG volunteers do. I would also like to thank anyone who has written to me. At Xmas I had tons of mail which made it far more bearable. Mail is the highlight of everyday and if I haven't replied it's not because I don't appreciate your support.

It's a bit like groundhog day here. Sometimes it feels quite surreal. The only thing that really changes is my mood! Groundhog day consists of education, roll-checks, eating, sleeping, gym and a weekly visit. I also study in my room and there's often not enough hours in the day. I am enhanced and I'm therefore on the enhanced wing with my own shower room. It's the end of the week now and I'm looking forward to a lie-in and relaxing weekend.

Thanks to everyone who has supported me.

Love, Madeline

## Prisoner Letters – Joe Harris

Since my last article I've had an eventful time, I won the appeal against my sentence, getting it reduced from 3 to 2 years, I spent 3 months at HMP Lewes and just recently, without warning, I've been moved to HMP Bullingdon. My time at Lewes was very productive, I was going along to pottery, painting and drawing lessons, I was helping repair old computers that a charity then sent to schools in Africa and Albania, I was a toe-by-toe mentor on my wing helping people with their literacy skills and was also being trained up to be a mentor helping out in the maths lessons. On top of this I was down the gym 5 times a week preparing myself for the next Mr Universe contest!!

The vegan food at Lewes was good and the amazing food parcels sent in by the VPSG made it even better and ensured I got all the essential omega oils, vitamins, minerals and the 'chocolate' I needed.

Whilst at Lewes I also saw some of the benefits of the VPSG's continuing prison shop campaign when soya desserts and soya milk started to be sold in the canteen. These changes are so important to vegan prisoners and with a lot more exciting improvements in terms of equal opportunities for strict ethical vegans on the horizon, it's essential that everyone continues supporting the VPSG financially and by taking part in their letter-writing campaign to help make these future changes happen. I can honestly say that the work the VPSG does, particularly considering the nature of prison bureaucracy, has been amazing and of huge benefit to myself and all other vegan prisoners who have sacrificed their liberty.

In order to deal with the prison experience it's essential to stay positive and to have something to look forward to every day, so it was with this attitude that

I arrived at HMP Bullingdon. I'm still getting settled in at the moment but once I get my gym and education timetable sorted out time will start flying by again. The VPSG informed the prison of my arrival and so they were all prepared for my vegan diet. They've made me a very happy man by giving me extra marmite sandwiches, they've also given me permission to take part in the VPSG's vegan confectionary trial (to see what we'd like in the prison shop) and thankfully unlike at Woodhill, Bullingdon doesn't seem to have a resident soya milk thief!

Once again a massive thank you to Justine, my family, friends and everyone who's supported me and of course to the VPSG and all its volunteers and supporters.

Joe x

## Prisoner Letters - Sarah Gisborne

Dear VPSG & Supporters,

You know prison would be a lot harder without the care and support I receive.

Saying thank you really doesn't convey how it makes me feel when I receive a parcel full of chocolate, vitamins and tofu.

I am privileged and feel lucky to know that I am taken care of.

With silly sentences being given the VPSG are vitally needed for the long term vegan prisoners.

We, as prisoners, play our part in

pushing for improvements, but nothing moves the system better than outside pressure from VPSG.

Only when you have been without a bar of vegan chocolate for 6 months do you fully appreciate the small things you miss. **Continues page 4**

# Prisoner Letters – Jonny Ablewhite

My Dear Vegan Friends,

Winter brings the cruelest months – but I made it! Enduring Christmas and New Year was like holding my breath underwater but now, gasping, I have finally surfaced. Praise all the vegan Gods in the pantheon! I've recycled this just for them! A special 'Thank You' for all the cards too, including the Birthday ones. Probably a day my poor mum would prefer to forget! Birthdays are of course an unnecessary self-indulgence (I'm kidding!) but I've realized I'm now so old I may die in here; or at least become incontinent! Now the anti-climactic festivities are gladly over, I can direct my life's focus away from that consumerist cacophony of nonsensical celebration back onto what matters, the source of all my joy: tofu, tomato and mushroom pie!! I love this creation; I especially worship the mushroom! She is the blessed cousin of the very bacterial cells that burst and billowed all creation into being all those millions and millions of years ago! While our species homo 'sapiens' may soon be left as an indistinct scar on the weather-worn face of history, from the ashes the mushroom shall arise again; a fungal Phoenix – behold and fear this beautiful and gallant organism!!

This slight sojourn into my labyrinthine internal dialogue doesn't disguise the wonderful fact that however tedious prison can get – and it can get tedious – you can always rely on good ol' fashioned vegan cooking to lift you from the doldrums, skywards again. However disillusioned I become about the uselessness of my time here, an the inordinate expense and effort this sacrilegious State is prepared to expend in keeping me here; however melancholic I become when contemplating the irreparable wounds of 6 billion of us are leaving on this miraculous planet, I always seek solace in the comfort of taste, the blissful squish of mushrooms in fine sauce exploding on the palate – a wholesome, nutritionally packed, morally imperious feast!! As AR vegans we may be fewer than the few, and we may never witness the utopias we crave but, dagnabbit, we tried – an we ate well along the way!!

Yet lately this monotonous regime has often left me on the painful wrack of boredom. I'm stuck between Open University modules and, despite the Spanish and German lessons, I crave more learning. I shall begin the preparatory reading for my next module 3 months early! The Philosophy group does bring some succour. We're currently ploughing through Existentialism, leaving Nietzsche and

Sartre bewildered in our opinionated, post-modern wake! We'll be moving through Charles Fourier and Emma Goldman soon so I'll keep you informed if any anarcho-vegan prison phalanxes are about to erupt! Sadly, the boredom did get so desperate at Christmas that I sacrificed my ascetical principles and forked out for a rug, courtesy of that "laminated book of dreams" we all love: the Argos catalogue! However, I have discovered there is more to the prison rug than you may first assume; you don't just buy them, you adopt them! In here grown men nurture their 'rug babies'. Like orphans discovered on our doorsteps we cradle and preen them like surrogate mothers – and clearly the perpetual vacuuming is a sublimated form of breast feeding!

Once I had gained the courage to leave my rug-child, I began venturing back to the beckoning arms of the prison band. The exploits of this 'musical' troupe evolve onwards and upwards. We've whittled our talents down to a duo which, since the guitarist is called Cane, I've aptly named "Cane and Able"! I'm yet to be slain by him but he may garrotte me with his G-string (oo er!) if I write yet another lyric about the slaughter in Iraq, the farms or the labs! Cheery ditties penned from prison are a rarity – and they should remain so!

Finally, my fondest salutations to you all – for the letters and cards and visits: for everything! Our vegan communities are a wonder to behold and I live in perpetual, concrete hope that our message will be universalized: all hail the vegan dawn on that fine, dazzling day! Nevertheless, I know this weary world can often seem impossible to live on. With hopes for significant moral progress being increasingly dashed on the rocks of bureaucracy, ignorance and intransigence, it is easy to become disheartened. Yet I believe that social evolution is possible though consistent planning at a local, regional and international level – this includes organizing all means available to the activist: from lobbying MPs, giving school talks, ethical consuming, non-cooperation, action and protest: the whole panoply. It is especially important we maintain the freedom and responsibility to organize our ethics in empowered public spaces, critical public spheres. These are charged hotbeds of countervailing influence and flourish in citizen media; electronic and physical: in public meetings, talks, camps, podcasts, blogs and websites that function at the heart of an empowered vegan consciousness. Here we can share our capacity for 'reflection, rage and

rebellion'. Here we can open a dialogue with our local communities, with others opposed to State hegemony and then question and challenge the structure of centralized power. Here we can engage in indispensable questions about how to conceive of ourselves, how to create and act, how to produce and thus construct our own affirmed and sustainable realities and futures that are bereft of commercial, hierarchical and patriarchal conditioning. Indeed, "these are not marginal experiments – they are the mainstay of large numbers of communities across the world. That is where the future lies." (Vandana Shiva)  
I await the future with confidence and belief!

Brightest Vegan Blessings to You All,

Jonny.

## From page 3

I just received a great parcel today with chocolate, tinned French beans, mushy peas, Echinacea and vitamin C tablets. I feel so honoured and proud to be vegan and have the care you all have shown me on this visit to HMP. I know the parcels are not cheap, but they are a lifeline to us in here.

When a vegan comes out of prison healthy it is down to the VPSG's tireless work and efforts. They must never be taken for granted.

Aramark have recently added some more vegan products to their prison shop list after much pressure from the VPSG, but they will continue pressing for all their recommendations [including vegan chocolate] to be added to canteen sheets; not just a few items. It's all progress and with your help by writing to your MP on the prison shop issue, we will eventually be able to buy more vegan products ourselves.

I can see the home stretch now and looking forward to getting back to work, but I have never felt alone here, because of the VPSG support and of course all my friends too.

I will always be in your debt.

Vegan – The only way to be. Sarah x



# Vegan Prisoners Support Group

NEWS-November 2008

Disclaimer: The views in the VPSG newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor. Responsibility can not be taken for the accuracy of statements made by contributors or the verification of material sent to VPSG for inclusion in the newsletter.

## Prisoner Letter - Sarah Whitehead *Birthday - 12 February*



Hi everyone!  
I'm lying on the bed in my cell, listening to Bon Jovi, eating vegan cookies and thinking "This is easy"! I miss my animals desperately of course, but knowing they are safe and happy makes being in prison just another interesting phase in my life!

Thanks to the wonderful VPSG the

food continues to be excellent and our new canteen list now includes vegan wine gums and Whizzers chocolate beans. All too tempting – thank goodness for being in the gym 5-6 hrs every day!

I am tending to the birds twice a day now while Heather is in court. It really is a testament to Heather's dedication that the lives of these birds have improved so much and particularly the survival of Moonlight. The ins and outs of that episode will make for an entertaining evening when we are all out!

Having the support of so many people outside prison is so important. Thank you to all of you who take the time and effort to write to me, I will never forget your kindness. Thank you most of all to the amazing angels who are looking after my animals – you are the best! To all of you working hard to make a difference, keep it up – I can't wait to be back out there doing my bit!

Lots of love

Sarah xxx

(HMP Bronzefield)

## Prisoner Letter - Dan Amos *Birthday - 19 November*



Hello all,  
After being in Exeter for nearly two months and Winchester for a month now, I've come to realise that the time has gone faster than I could ever have imagined. I can't remember who said it - or exactly what they said,

but it is certainly true that "in prison the minutes seem like hours, but the

months seem like days".

When I was remanded in Winchester and ended up 150 miles away in Devon I was surprised to say the least! I've tried to rationalise quite how that happened but those of you who have had any experience of the prison system will know what I mean when I say that it frequently defies explanation! Needless to say I am happy to be back near my friends and family.

Being in Winchester with my friend and co-defendant Gregg means that there

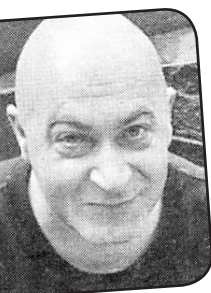
is one less prison for the VPSG to deal with and I hope that makes things a little bit easier for them as they do a remarkable job liaising with the prison and ensuring that all our vegan needs are met.

I'd like to thank everyone who has written to me, it makes such a difference to be able to have an intelligent conversation, even if it is by mail. Keep them coming!

Dan

(HMP Winchester)

## Prisoner Letter - Sean Kirtley *Birthday - 11 December*



Dear all,  
Well I'm now in my 3rd prison on this sentence and doing ok. I'm back doing my I.T. clait plus course and am working towards getting a diploma, as well as this I'm boxing blankets in a workshop plus going to the gym doing chest, arms and rowing. Yes I've lost weight!

As always the VPSG are doing a great job making sure I get my monthly nutritional parcel, Veg1 multivitamins and this last month have helped to have it ok-ed by the prison for my wonderful partner to send in a pair of vegan trainers to me which I desperately needed (from Vegetarian Shoes).

The food here is really good, vegan pizza, pizza baguette, veggie wraps etc, tons of fruit, weekly vegan pack and a plethora of other vegan meals on

the menu and puddings! Apple crumble being my favourite!

The support is still amazing as ever from my partner, family, friends and strangers. I got 15 letters through the door a few Saturdays ago! I spend plenty of time replying too.

Thanks to everyone especially the VPSG for the continued wall of support.

Love Sean

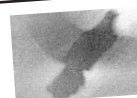
(HM Prison Stafford)

## Prisoner Letter - John Smith *Birthday - 6 March*

Glad to come back on the VPSG list - I shall update you in the next newsletter. Needless to say VPSG have been of great help while I have been in prison and I wish to recognise this.....

John Smith  
(HMP Lindholme)

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## Prisoner Letter - Heather Nicholson *Birthday - 30 January*

Dear Friends,  
Well the trial has started and I am feeling fine and stronger than ever. Everything they are talking about has nothing whatsoever to do with me and it is frustrating having to sit there and await my turn to speak. One thing is for sure, I will not be devastated if I am found guilty and I won't be celebrating if I am released because the only losers are the animals inside HLS. It's all quite tiring as I am woken up at 5 am every morning and taken to reception at 6 am for two pieces of wholemeal toast with Marmite and a cup of Rooibos tea (my own). Then I have to be strip searched of which I am the current record holder at 40 seconds. After that I sit in the next holding area with all kinds of "colourful" characters often exhibiting bizarre behaviour until the van arrives at around 7.15 am. It is then about an hour in an uncomfortable metal box to Winchester. As we arrive the photographers start snapping away through the windows of the van, but they are not looking for us. It makes you realise how Amy Winehouse etc must feel like at times though! It is great to finally arrive at Winchester as all of the guards there are so lovely. They have taken such good care of me. They always ask how I am and we have a laugh together. Many months ago Audrey arranged with the security-firm Reliance for me to be fed with a proper vegan diet. As it is such

a long trial it is obvious to everyone that I must be fed properly. Thanks to VPSG's advice and Reliance's understanding and sympathy so far I have had watercress, raw carrots, humous, Ryvita, Bombay potatoes, rice and chilli, vegetable and tomato stew, Granose vegetable soup, pasties and samosas. I know it sounds a bit dramatic, but the guards there are so supportive and kind that they have, in a small way, helped to restore my faith in human nature (okay calm down Heather, give me a bag of watercress and I go completely over the top!). The big news on the Bronzefield front is the new canteen list which is much improved thanks again to the hard work of Jo-Ann and the VPSG team. The vegan items are available to everyone now which is great. There are a lot of healthy items and best of all Plamil chocolate-orange spread that we just eat straight out of the jar with a spoon! There is still no vegan make-up on there though and that was a big disappointment. My birds are still a great source of contentment and happiness for me. Thank goodness Sarah is here to care for them while I am in court. The aviary is now filled with pots of living herbs, grass, dandelions, chickweed and a giant sunflower. It's like a jungle in there and the birds love it. The sunflower is like a tree to them and they love to perch and play in it. On September 5th a cockatiel chick called

Moonlight accidentally hatched and had to be rescued by me when he was just one week old. He was still blind, freezing cold and his head was bleeding. I hand-reared him for 24-hours until I managed to get him handed out by the kind officers to my great friend Pat Laird who rushed him to Wildlife Aid to get him an incubator and special food. It was touch and go but thanks to Pat's wonderful care (and her able assistant Sarah Gisborne) Moonlight has made it and is now a beautiful, happy, cheeky, flying bird. It's wonderful and all thanks to Pat, Sarah and Wildlife Aid (Leatherhead). That little bird put everything in perspective for me. When I wasn't sure if he would live or die I couldn't have cared less about the trial. I feel utterly privileged to be connected to all of you wonderful people and be warned because when I get out I want to come and see all of you who have supported me through this and give you a huge hug. Lots of love and thanks,  
Heather xxxxxx  
(HMP Bronzefield)



## Prisoner Letter - Don Currie *Birthday - 13 April*

Dear All,  
It's hard to believe but I've been in prison close to 3 yrs. As time goes on it gets harder to write as one day tends to be much the same as the next. As far as food and toiletries go, things have never been so good (since being in prison). I'm able to order from Honesty Cosmetics, Ethical Wares and the Vegan Society. I'm also trying to get Veganicity supplements added to the Facilities List. It does lift my spirits to

support the vegan companies. I hand-wash all my clothes using Bio-D powder. I actually find it quite therapeutic. I also use Bio-D washing-up liquid and soon I will have the toilet cleaner. I know this may seem a little sad but being surrounded by vegan products makes my cell feel like home. The vegan nutritional parcel from VPSG is definitely one of the highlights of the month. I love all the healthy nuts, seeds and dried fruits.

I mix them all together and chuck them on my cereal. A big thanks to the VPSG and its supporters and to everyone for everything. Love Don x  
(HMP Parkhurst)



## Sponsored Walk in Aid of VPSG

Thanks to all those supporters who sponsored Sonia Hayward and myself to raise funds for VPSG. It was a really hot day but off we set with water bottles and Roger and Hella to make sure we made it to the end. As 10,000

steps is the daily recommended amount of exercise we thought it would be easy – but we didn't take into consideration that Sonia never goes anywhere without her car and I sit for hours at the p.c. in the VPSG office so my legs don't get much exercise either. Anyhow hot and exhausted we eventually arrived at our destination ready to have something to eat cooked by Hella

and afterwards we all tucked into vegan Danish pastries delivered to our door by Rachel's cakes Enfield. We raised in total £1,758.50p which will ensure that nutritional parcels can be sent to those prisoners who are permitted them for quite a while. Thanks again not sure if I want to walk 10,000 steps ever again in the same day though!



## Prisoner Letter - Mel Broughton *Birthday - 5 July*

Hello everyone,  
Not too much has changed for me since I last wrote. I'm still a Cat A prisoner and I'm still on a unit, which, if I was an estate agent, I'd describe as "bijou" and intimate. It also comes complete with its own in-house 'monitoring' scheme.  
Since I last put pen to paper for the VPSG there has been an improvement in the provision of a vegan diet here at Woodhill. I'm realistic enough to know that being in a minority of one in a place like this means difficulties are always likely. However, thanks to the VPSG and some helpful officers at this end being in a minority is now a bit less difficult.  
This week I read a review about the release of the 'Animals Film' on dvd. It's been twenty-five years since this

ground-breaking exposé of animal exploitation was first screened on Channel 4. Sat here in my security cocoon I wonder what the chances are of such a film being shown on national t.v. now! The late Alan Brien, in his review of the 'Animals Film' for the Sunday Times, wrote twenty-five years ago "I do not know when I have come out of a screening so moved by the power of the cinema as a medium to transform the entire sensibility of an audience." Tonight on Channel 4 we have the latest in reality t.v.: kill it, cook it, skin it, wear it and then experiment on it!! And then once you've been suitably moved you can go to a Peta-recommended KFC.  
Thankfully, the news that filters from those who know better is much more affirming. A London vegan festival

busier than ever and more young people flexing their voices on behalf of the voiceless. The next 'Animals Film' is in the making.

I just want to finish by thanking everyone for their amazing support. My environment here is closed and claustrophobic but your support and determination makes the horizon of possibility unlimited.

Thank you.  
Mel  
(HMP Woodhill)



## Prisoner Letter - Kerry Whitburn *Birthday - 18 April*

Hi all. I hope you are all well and positive in mind, body and spirit. Well, just passed the halfway point (on September 30th) – three years served, three left to go. Not much changes from one day, week or month to any other, but it does enable a change of context when you have less left to serve than already served. At least NOW I have an idea of how time can seem to pass slowly or quickly depending on the season or forthcoming 'event'. For example, the Summer months always appear to pass quicker than, say, the Winter months. Though that may be due to the fact that Winter IS now much longer than our Summer! Also, the month before the halfway point was reached seemed to drag, whereas now I'm passed it I'm back to 'real time'. I can TRULY say that this is the first time in my life I've actually WISHED time away. Well, apart from when I was a child and I wished the days away before finishing a long and boring school term!  
My good friend John (Smith) was recently transferred to a Category C prison, so at the present I'm missing my 'coffee confidant' on the neighbouring wing. Yes, we lost count of the many times I'd 'pop over' to see John to spend an hour or two debating and discussing vegan menus in prisons or the availability of vegan chocolate on canteen forms. ALL important issues, I'm sure you'll all agree.  
Talking of food I was slightly concerned about WHAT the vegan meals would entail, after John had transferred! However, I was pleasantly surprised

as the vegan meals have remained superb. I'm not aware of who replaced John in the prison kitchens. I believe it IS someone who worked with John for a few days, sort of 'John's student'. Either way, he IS a vegan and has simply picked up where John left off. I must say that THIS prison has it exactly right where the care of vegans is concerned. As I've said, the food is excellent and the potential problems of provision of toiletries is eliminated by allowing us to order DIRECTLY from Honesty Cosmetics. All of this is possible due to the input of V.P.S.G. and the help and very valued support of them should NEVER be overlooked. Without them we WOULD be struggling! Before I finish I MUST say a MASSIVE thank you to EVERYONE who's written to me. You are ALL appreciated, and I AM SO SORRY to ANYONE I've not replied to during the last few months. Sadly, my gorgeous dog Karma left this world at the beginning of August. She was one of my BEST friends and I felt so guilty and sad that I couldn't say "GOODBYE". As I hope you can all imagine and appreciate this sad event devastated me and shook my emotional, psychological and spiritual foundations. Since 1998 until my arrest in 2005, Karma had been nearly everywhere with me and had done almost everything with me. She even came to work with me when I worked night duties and had frequented MANY demonstrations with me at Newchurch. I STILL become tearful when I talk and think about her, so I'm going to leave the subject, but I AM sincerely and truly

sorry to ANYONE I didn't reply to, but I lost focus on letters for a while as I couldn't face writing about Karma so many times. I hope you all understand and I hope you continue writing to me, as I DO appreciate you ALL and I am extremely grateful for your support. FINALLY (you lucky people!) I can truly say that the situation of being in prison has vastly improved since my beautiful soulmate, Jo', was released. To be able to speak with her EVERY night and enjoy visits with her can ONLY lift my spirits. This term in prison would've been so much more difficult (even with the amazing support from others) without such love and support I receive from Jo'. It also helps MASSIVELY knowing I will eventually be released to spend the rest of my life with her. So, in general life isn't TOO bad in such circumstances. Yes, I miss Jo' immensely, as I miss my amazing friends and my life I lived and enjoyed. But at least I'm not suffering. As are other beings of this world, and I won't be incarcerated forever. Unlike other beings of this world!  
Take care, you lot, and again...  
"THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING!"  
BIG HUGS AND MUCH LOVE –  
KERRY xxxx  
(HMP Lowdham Grange)





## Prisoner Letter - Natasha Avery *Birthday - 28 December*

Hi everybody. 18 months in now. Amazing how the time flies. I have to say that I am so pleased I am tripping off to the gym every day rather than getting carted off to Winchester Crown Court. Not my idea of fun! I do a lot of running & cycling & weights too & feel really fit. Me, Gregg & Dan have pleaded guilty to conspiracy to blackmail. It's a long story, but taking everything into account, we know we have made the right decision. Here at Bronzefield we've got a raw vegan doing all our food now in the kitchen which means the meals are really good at the moment. She does lots of sprouted seeds & pulses, delicious! This together with the monthly nutritional parcels means we are eating

very healthily. Sarah remains unconvinced by both Heather and myself banging on to her about the benefits of eating properly, & views anything healthy with suspicion! Sarah & I have been trained by The Samaritans to be listeners in the prison, helping people in distress. It's wonderful when you can make a difference. The highlight though since the last newsletter by a million miles is mine & Gregg's first interprison visit in 18 months. I'm still floating about with a big smile on my face being overly nice to people a week later! He looked fantastic, & so fit & strong. The visit was complete & utter heaven, a perfect two hours I will remember forever. We love

each other so much, & all our calls & letters (I'm on number 1043!) & now hopefully regular visits too, mean we do jail, as always, standing on our heads. Thanks to everyone who supports us – you know who you are & you are brilliant. 'Later's' as they say here! Love Natasha xxx  
(HMP Bronzefield)  
PS Is there anyone in Gloucester who can help? Is there anyone who is able to bring my elderly mother to visit me every couple of months – they would need to be reliable and a good driver of course because she is precious to me.



## Prisoner Letter - Gregg Avery *Birthday - 5 December*

Yes folks it's time for another story from Gregg. Well, 18 months in and I'm now working in the prison library with Dan (Amos) which is great, we have a laugh and oh to have an intelligent conversation about world events again. We are both due to sit down with the kitchen dept and devise a new 3 week vegan menu. They have never met genuine vegans before and are keen to learn from us which is refreshing. Jo-Ann is also in constant contact with them to offer advice, answer questions and constructive criticism where needed. It is difficult to explain just how

invaluable the VPSG is unless you've been inside. The prison system is one huge bureaucracy

and the VPSG are experts in making sure that us vegans are at the top of the agenda. With the experience of dealing with many hundreds of prisoners and scores of different prisons this expertise is put into practice on a daily basis. That is why 10 out of 10 vegans prefer the VPSG.

I'm really well, strong and fitter than ever and just about to dip under 7 minute miles when doing distance running.

A couple of weeks ago I had an interprison visit with my beautiful wife Natasha. We sped off up the M3 in a taxi with a prison officer either side of me in the back. I would have given a royal wave out of the window, but this was somewhat hampered by the fact that I was handcuffed to an officer. It turned out I was the only one who knew the way to Bronzefield, bloody hell! I might as well have driven myself there. Especially when we got to Bronzefield and the meter was on £110! I explained I'd left my wallet in

my other jacket. What followed was 2 hours of heaven and only Natasha could make a day inside into one of the best days of my life. I floated back to Winchester and the bubble was only briefly burst by one of the screws falling asleep on my shoulder. Since that visit I've been on a cloud and the memory of Natasha walking towards me will stay with me forever.

Well kids another instalment of Gregg's prison tales is nearly over, but before I go, people often ask if I need anything? I need only one thing and that is greetings cards so I can write in them and send them to Natasha, blank inside with any picture on the front are best. As few or as many as you can send me would be brilliant, just post them into me. Thanks to everyone for your support, you will never know how much it means.

Lots of love  
Gregg xx  
(HMP Winchester)



## Prisoner Letter - Jonny Ablewhite *Birthday - 27 January*

Dear VPSG supporters,  
Just a quick note (how unlike me!) to thank the VPSG for their continued support and assistance. A calm and equanimous life in jail would not be possible without them. Life in Lowdham goes on (and on) I finally received my cat C (woohoo!) and plan to leave in the New Year. My Masters exams are now over for the year so I can relax and concentrate on the next VEGANDIA album "Political Animals". The first CD "Angel Face, how could you?" is now available

FREE if you email your postal address to [vegandia@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:vegandia@hotmail.co.uk) ENJOY! The tour starts as soon as it feasibly can! (- and when I've got a band together!). Again, massive adoration to the VPSG for making prison life bearable. Brightest Vegan Blessings, Jonny Ablewhite (HMP Lowdham Grange)



Storage facilities are needed by prisoners on the VPSG listing for furniture, household stuff etc South of England would be great but can travel. If you can help, please contact Natasha direct:  
Natasha Avery NR8987  
(HMP Bronzefield)

VPSG has to announce that sadly both John and Bessie Overell passed away within a short time of each other - they had both been supporters of VPSG for many years.



# Vegan Prisoners Support Group

NEWS - September 2009

## 15 YEARS OF CAMPAIGNING FOR EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR VEGAN PRISONERS

### APRIL 1994: VPSG HIGHLIGHTS CONCERNS TO PRISON SERVICE

Shortly after VPSG was established in 1994, a Report was presented to the Prison Service highlighting concerns that there was a lack of provisions in place for vegan prisoners.

The Report outlined, in order to ensure 'equal opportunities' for this minority group, access to similar items freely available to other prisoners and detailed information on their dietary requirements was required.

VPSG identified that vegan prisoners were also disadvantaged in prison shops. Vegan mainstays such as nuts, seeds, and suitable protein items as well as hygiene/body care products needed to be available.

Research showed there were over 114 protein items, 118 confectionary/biscuit items confectionery items and 120 body care/beauty products, but not one of them suitable for vegans.

### MARCH 1995: RESEARCH/STUDY COMMENCED

The VPSG began collating information from vegan prisoners to ensure the recommendations presented to the Prison Service were accurate. The research showed there continued to be a shortage of information on the vegan diet and a lack of vegan products in prison shops.

### JUNE 1996: GUIDELINES FOR VEGAN PRISONERS

After two years of campaigning finally GUIDELINES FOR THE CARE OF VEGANS were installed in every prison!

### APRIL 2002

A report was presented to the Director of the Prison Service highlighting areas where vegans remained disadvantaged – assurances were that vegans would be provided with equal opportunities in all areas of their care by end August 2002. The Head of Catering, Alan Tuckwood, was the first to take VPSG's recommendations on board and the PSO5000\* was revised.

\*Prison Service Order

### FEBRUARY 2003

Alan Tuckwood assisted with the compilation of VPSG's first CATERING INFORMATION PACK [CIP] which was distributed to every prison. The CIP contained Nutritional Guidelines and other useful information for use in prison kitchens on this specialist diet.

### MAY 2004

P/O Stuart Head was presented with the Butler Trust Award for his input into improving catering for vegans, including his ideas for producing the Prison News Sheet and the Catering Information Pack.

### DECEMBER 2004

The issue of personal hygiene was finally addressed and Mr. Gary Pyne, Central Purchasing Unit/Prison HQ sourced basic prison issue toiletries suitable for vegans.

### AUGUST 2009: TWO MAIL ORDER CATALOGUES NOW FINALLY APPROVED BY THE PRISON SERVICE

VPSG have been highlighting their concerns that vegans remain disadvantaged in Prison Shops since 1994. In August 2008 NOMS\* awarded a new national contract for the provision of retail services in public prisons in England and Wales. The service included a new standard product list that extended the range of products available for order by minority groups, including vegan prisoners, to provide daily essentials such as shampoo, chocolate and a variety of snack items.

In August 2009 this was further enhanced by the mobilisation of a new mail order service offering access to two new companies supplying a range of health supplements including nuts and seeds and toiletries that are suitable for all prisoners, including vegans.

However, this doesn't mean it's all plain sailing from now on as it is still a local prison decision whether to include standard products on local order forms, or to add these companies to their local listing. The VPSG team still have their work cut out contacting individual prisons to outline the importance of vegan prisoners having access to both these mail order catalogues to ensure that they can order their body care, hygiene requirements and also make healthy purchases of nuts, seeds, dried fruits, herbal tea bags and supplements.

In the meantime, VPSG are continuing to work with NOMS\* and the retail provider to secure further improvements to the selection of products and cost of delivery. Efforts also need to be concentrated on vegan prisoners' access to suitable footwear.

\*National Offender Management Service

## GUIDELINES INSTALLED IN ALL PRISONS IN 1996

### PRISON SERVICE GUIDELINES ON THE CARE OF VEGANS

#### BASIC BELIEFS

1.1 Veganism is not a religion but a philosophy whereby the use of an animal for food, clothing or any other purpose is regarded as wholly unacceptable.

1.2 The majority of Vegans reject entirely, anything which has its origins in the exploitation, suffering or death of any creature. An individual may lead a Vegan lifestyle for one particular reason or for a combination of reasons, and this may result in some Vegans being stricter than others in what they deem as acceptable and unacceptable. Vegan beliefs are followed by individuals within various faiths, to varying degrees, and by individuals of no faith.

1.3 Most Vegans will not involve themselves directly, or indirectly, in anything whereby their lifestyle and beliefs are compromised or violated, either for themselves or for others. Throughout their lives, Vegans will seek to sever all links with, and dependencies upon, the use or abuse of animals.

#### DIET

2.1 A Vegan diet is based on fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, beans, pulses and cereals. The diet omits all animal products including meat, poultry, fish, sea creatures, invertebrates, eggs, animal milks, honey and royal jelly. Vegans should not be required to handle such foodstuffs.

Food/drink containing or made with any of the above or their derivatives should not be served.

The Vegan Society can provide helpful information on a range of issues including how nutrients are obtained from a Vegan diet.

2.2 Human nutrient requirements, with the exception of B12 can be met by a diet composed entirely of plant foods, but to do so it must be carefully planned using a wide selection of

foods.

Fortified Yeast extract is a good source of some of the B-vitamins, including vitamin B12 as is fortified Soya milk.

#### PURCHASE OF SUPPLEMENTS AND REMEDIES

3.1 Herbal remedies, dietary, or food supplements of a vegetable or synthetic origin such as Iodine (Kelp tablets) may be requested through the prison shop.

#### DRESS

4.1 Clothing and footwear must be from non-animal (eg plant or synthetic) sources. The wearing of all animal fibres, skins and materials including wool, silk, leather and suede will not be accepted by Vegan prisoners.

#### TOILETRIES

5.1 Toiletries containing any animal derived ingredients and toiletries where either the product or its ingredients have been tested on animals are totally unacceptable and are not permitted.

Therefore, whenever toiletries suitable for Vegans are required, establishments should make arrangements for such items to be stocked in the prison canteen or ordered in as necessary.

5.2 Vegans should not be expected to use inappropriate toiletries.

5.3 Vegans should not be asked to handle or use substances that have involved animal testing on the product or its ingredients.

#### WORK

6.1 Most Vegan prisoners will not wish to be involved in any way in the care of animals on prison farms. Vegans usually choose not to engage in any sport, hobby, or trade that directly or indirectly, causes stress, distress, suffering, or death to any creature.

6.2 Vegans should not be expected to work in butchery or handle anything of animal origin or content.

### NOVEMBER 2004

VPSG were invited to take a stand at the Prison Service National Catering Workshop. The interest by Catering Managers was overwhelming.

### APRIL 2006

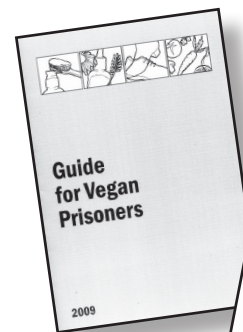
The Vegan Prisoners Support Group and Vegan Society were again invited by Alan Tuckwood to the National Catering Conference for prisons in the public sector at Heathrow with Catering Managers eager to chat with our team.

It was a busy day and attracted even more interest than our stall at the previous Conference in 2004.

### GUIDE FOR VEGAN PRISONERS

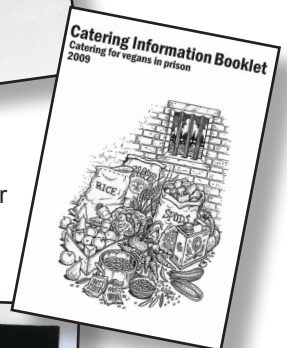
The information included in VPSG's new 'Guide for Vegan Prisoners' provides prisoners with the relevant rules/regulations useful in prison.

Our handy 'Catering Information Booklet' and 'Cooking Behind Bars' will shortly join the information provided to prison kitchens and which will also be issued to vegan prisoners upon request.



Issued to all prisoners  
June 2009

Updated  
September  
2009



Planned for  
issue October  
2009

### MAY 2003

VPSG issued the first Prison News Sheet – available for viewing on [www.vpsg.info](http://www.vpsg.info) - news sheets should keep Catering Managers up-to-date with the latest nutritional information on veganism. The Frequently Asked Questions section proved popular. This section invited questions from Catering Managers on those specialist issues on which they needed clarification.

### DECEMBER 2005: VPSG/VEGAN SOCIETY PRESENT FIRST AWARDS

It was decided to jointly present awards to the top prisons who were ensuring the vegan diet was not only nutritionally sound, but interesting and varied.

Participation in the scheme created a lot of interest from Catering Managers. Yearly awards were planned.



## NUTRITIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR A VEGAN DIET

Food Group	Daily amount <sup>1</sup>	What It Provides	Suggestions
Vegetables	2+, 100g [4 oz]	vitamins, minerals, protein, fibre	broccoli, kale, spring greens, cabbage, spinach, carrots, peppers, tomatoes, pumpkin
Fruit	3+, large pieces <sup>2</sup>	vitamins, minerals, fibre, vitamin C to help absorb iron	include some citrus fruit
Nuts	1-2, 25g [1 oz]	protein, oils, minerals, fibre	almonds, walnuts, cashews, hazelnuts, peanuts, nut butters
Oils	as required for cooking	energy, oils	unhydrogenated rapeseed oil
Wholegrains and root vegetables	2+, 100g [4oz]	energy, protein, vitamins, fibre	pasta, oats, bread, rice, corn, millet, buckwheat, barley, bulgur wheat, potatoes, sweet potatoes, yam, parsnips
Pulses	1+, 100g [4 oz]	energy, protein, minerals, fibre	peas, lentils, chickpeas, baked beans, kidney beans, soya products

As a general guide food from the above groups should be eaten every day to provide a solid foundation for a vegan diet. Increased servings may be needed according to energy requirements. Any margarine used should be non-hydrogenated. Rapeseed oil is preferred to sunflower, safflower, soy or sesame oil as it provides a better balance of types of fat, including omega-3 fats.

Key Nutrient	Daily amount <sup>1</sup>	Suggestions
Calcium	700 - 1200 mg	An adequate intake of calcium can be assured by 3½ litres per week of fortified soya milk [containing at least 120mg/100ml] or an equivalent amount of other calcium rich foods: tofu prepared with calcium sulphate (see label for calcium content); green leafy vegetables, such as kale or spring greens (about 150 mg per 100g), or a vegan calcium supplement. Note that calcium from spinach is poorly absorbed.
Vitamin B <sup>12</sup>	3 micrograms+	Fortified foods or supplements. E.g., 25g per week of a yeast extract fortified with 50 mcg of B12 per 100g or 600ml per day of soya milk fortified with 0.5 micrograms B12 per 100ml or a daily B12 tablet containing at least 3 micrograms B12.
Iodine	150 to 500 micrograms	Iodine is important for good metabolism and thyroid function. Ideal intakes for adults lie between 150 and 500 micrograms a day. While this can be achieved by careful use of seaweed it may be more convenient and reliable to use a supplement

Stephen Walsh PhD., Chair of the Vegan Society and Spokesperson on Diet and Health.  
Updated March 2006

<sup>1</sup> Daily amounts are given as number of servings followed by serving size, for cooked foods serving sizes are given as cooked weights.

<sup>2</sup> Each piece of fruit should be around 100g, e.g. one orange, banana or apple. For smaller fruits a serving should be sufficient pieces to make up 100g, e.g. 2 nectarine oranges or about thirty grapes.

## IMPORTANCE OF NUTS/SEEDS IN THE VEGAN DIET

Nuts and seeds offer an abundance of nutritional benefits and are an important part of a healthy vegan diet when combined with grains and vegetables. They are a good source of vitamins, minerals, protein, essential fatty acids and fibre.

The daily requirement is 1-2 servings. A recommended serving would be 1oz (30g). Walnuts supply copper and manganese and are full of linolenic acid, which can be converted to omega-3 fatty acids in the body. Providing just 6 walnut halves a day will provide daily requirements of omega 3.

### ALMONDS

High in riboflavin, copper, magnesium and vitamin E. They also contain zinc and are a rich source of calcium.

### HAZELNUTS

Good source of B vitamins, calcium, magnesium, potassium and vit E.

### CASHEWS

Can be used raw or toasted and are a good source of copper and magnesium.

### BRAZILS

Good source of selenium; one per day will fulfil the daily requirement of selenium.

### PEANUTS

Although peanuts are not a nut but a legume, they are a good protein source and also contain vit E, folate, fibre, protein, copper, phosphorous and magnesium. Peanut butter is a nutritious and versatile form.

### PUMPKIN SEEDS

Can be used in salad and stir-fry and are an excellent source of iron and zinc.

### SUNFLOWER SEEDS

Can be used in salad, stir-fry, burgers and nut roast. They are the richest seed source of vitamin E and an excellent source of copper and magnesium.

### SESAME SEEDS

Can be used in sweet and savoury dishes and are nice in stir-fry. They are a good source of zinc, magnesium and calcium. Tahini or sesame butter is a useful form.

### FLAXSEEDS (LINSEEDS)

This highly nutritious seed is best known for the high levels of omega 3 that it contains. Also a good source of magnesium, phosphorus and copper.

## FRUIT AND VEGETABLES 5-A-DAY

Two to three pieces of fruit can form part of the 5-a-day, but if only two are provided then the other three portions should be provided by vegetables. This includes vegetables which have been incorporated into dishes, as well as side portions.

Three heaped tablespoons of chickpeas, kidney beans or lentils can also be counted as no more than one portion per day. Potatoes do not count since they are a starchy food.

## THE CATERING INFORMATION PACK

THE CATERING INFORMATION PACK contains comprehensive information on what the vegan diet comprises of to be healthy, such as basic dietary guidelines, nutritional charts etc. The pack also provides answers to those most Frequently Asked Questions "how is B12 provided in the vegan diet" "how much calcium is required daily" "is membership of the Vegan Society needed before vegan supplements are issued". The information included recommends nothing more – nothing less than other prisoners are provided with in their prison diet.

## IMPORTANCE OF YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT

VPSG would like to thank all those supporters who have funded our work over the years. Without each and every one of you we would not have been able to campaign for the rights of vegan prisoners. We hope you will help us to finish the job by your continued support.



Being part of the VPSG-team requires a multi-faceted approach to the various tasks one encounters with the care of prisoners.

On a personal level I analyse the diet sheets which prisoners forward to us and make the necessary recommendations if there is cause for concern, or if the diet is not adequate for vegan prisoners. This may entail a phone call to the kitchen manager at any given prison or advising a prisoner to arrange a meeting with kitchen staff. Although prisons have been provided with guidelines in respect of dietary needs, appropriate toiletries, clothing and footwear for ethical vegans, mistakes do occur and this is where VPSG steps in to rectify the situation.

As a Caseworker I also often assist with the provision of suitable healthcare products and clothing. Whenever the need arises, the family of the relevant prisoner will be informed if particular issues need to be addressed and kept up to date with any progress made.

Last but not least, I endeavour to visit various prisoners whenever I can, apart from the obvious benefits this social interaction may bring, it gives me an opportunity to discuss prisoner's personal concerns face to face and hopefully lighten their burden somewhat! Hella



It is now 15 years since Jo-Ann decided to campaign for equal opportunities for vegan prisoners; and joining the VPSG was the best decision I have ever taken.

I design newsletters and leaflets for supporters, prisoners and prisons. I designed the newsletter you are reading now; I'm currently working on a 'Catering Information Booklet'; 'Vegan Cooking Behind Bars' and a news-sheet for Governors, Catering Managers and Prison Shops. It is very rewarding and my main challenge is to make

On Saturday 4th July I cycled 10 times (approx 15 miles) around Brockwell Park in South London, to raise funds for VPSG. The bike I had borrowed from a friend wasn't in the best condition, but at least it was stuck on a high gear which proved useful as the park has a steep hill. Neither was the saddle something to be desired, but in the face of adversity, I managed to complete the course in just over two hours and only dismounted once. When I finished I laid down on the grass which was very welcome.

Thanks to everyone who sponsored me and for supporting the VPSG's invaluable work on behalf of vegan prisoners. Robin Lane.



the information visually attractive to persuade people to read it.

You know that in human history changes have not been achieved from one day to another, and all attempts to 'change the system' take a lot of effort. Our main objective is to reform the Prison System and to help prisoners in their ethical principles. Your financial support ensures we remain in existence to make sure prisoners are provided with a nutritional vegan diet and lifestyle. Lidia



On looking back over the past 15 years, I have been wondering if all the hard work and long hours to facilitate the current changes now in place in prisons

was worth it or not? To be frank if I had known that the wheels of change would take so long, I am not too sure if I would have ventured down this same path, BUT one thing I am certain about is that FINALLY equal opportunities are so close VPSG definitely needs to continue to finish the job I started in 1994!

I remember when I first began researching the care of vegans in prison, I found out the vegan diet was not as nutritionally sound as it should be and it was usually soya burgers with everything! My biggest surprise was to discover there wasn't even access to vegan soap and toothpaste. I wondered how prisoners were expected to perform their daily hygiene? I then thought, what a mammoth task I was facing.

Before the installation of the Guidelines vegan prisoners were even severely reprimanded if they refused to wear non-vegan shoes. Fortunately, nowadays there is a huge difference to

how vegans are treated thanks to the hard work of the VPSG team.

VPSG Caseworkers now help prisoners with day to day problems, especially when they first arrive within the prison system or move to a new prison.

Some of the tasks Caseworkers often need to tackle, is explaining to a prison why a vegan is unable to work as a cleaner, as general cleaning products are currently not vegan. Or outlining the many jobs they are able to accept without compromising their vegan beliefs. Our assistance is often sought when a vegan prisoner is offered a job in the kitchen or gardens, but requires steel capped boots to comply with health and safety rules.

The work at the VPSG is varied to say the least and all the VPSG team have to be flexible and have a good working knowledge of prison rules/regulations and be able to multi-task, so I would like to take this opportunity of thanking my team for that flexibility and all their hard work.

Jo-Ann

## URGENT APPEAL FOR PRISONERS' ANIMALS

We mustn't forget prisoners' animals who are also affected when they suddenly lose their guardian.

It is important for prisoners to know that their animals are looked after while they are serving their sentences. So let's all try to help out on this one by contributing to a Special Prisoner Appeal to help with those vet and foster care bills that need paying. This would be one less thing for them to worry about.

All cheques should be made payable as usual to VPSG, but write SPA on the back of the cheque.



# Vegan Prisoners Support Group

NEWS - November 2010

## ITS NEARLY 17 YEARS SINCE VPSG SET OUT TO REFORM THE CARE OF VEGAN PRISONERS

No reform is an easy task BUT the VPSG team continue working hard to ensure equal opportunities for vegan prisoners are in place. Our office opens 6 days a week to deal with prisoner problems, to give advice to prison kitchens and to provide a helpline to vegans attending court.

### Some of our successes

#### No More Leather Shoes!

After much lobbying on our part, vegan prisoners no longer had to wear leather shoes or use unsuitable hygiene products as we were given permission to provide vegan footwear and parcels of vegan toiletries. Before VPSG was established it wasn't uncommon for a vegan prisoner to be without suitable toiletries for up to THREE MONTHS!

#### Nutritional Recommendations

Every prison has been issued with a copy of our Catering Information booklet, which contains a wealth of knowledge on the requirements of a vegan diet. In addition we recommend the following each week:

- 3½ L fortified soya milk (to provide sufficient calcium and B12)
- 200g (7oz) mixed nuts and seeds (to provide omega 3 fatty acids, and important vitamins and minerals)
- 250g (9oz) mixed dried fruit, plus 14-21 pieces of fruit.

#### Vegan Toiletries Suitable For All Prisoners

We have successfully campaigned for the toiletries (shampoo, hair and body wash, toothpaste and deodorant) issued free on prison wings to be suitable for vegans.

#### Vegan Goodies Now Available In Prison Shops

A whole range of vegan items are now potentially available in the prison shops where prisoners spend their weekly 'pocket money'. However, it is up to each prison which items they choose from this range. Therefore if a prisoner arrives at a prison where there have been no vegans for a while, the list might need some updating. We are always willing to step in and help prisoners experiencing difficulties in having vegan items added.

### New prisoners

New prisoners are provided with our *Guide for Vegan Prisoners* (how to survive in prison) as well as a copy of our *Catering Infor-*

*mation Guide* (which we produced and sent to all prison catering managers to assist them in catering for vegans).

### Diet sheet records

We ask all new prisoners (and prisoners experiencing problems after a prison move) to complete our diet sheets for four weeks

and then return them to us for analysis. We then advise the prison how they can provide a varied nutritionally sound vegan option.

### Emergency arrest line



Our Emergency Arrest Line (07984 733 008) is available 24 hours a day. Once we are informed that a vegan has been arrested, we telephone the police station and then fax details on how to cater for their needs.

### Keeping catering managers up to date

Regular Prison News Sheets are sent to all catering managers, updating them with agreements we have made at our meetings with the Prison Service, and informing them of new vegan products available to prison kitchens.

### Yuletide in prison

We have just despatched a Yuletide recipe booklet to catering managers, containing tasty suggestions for 25 and 26 December and New Year. The booklet is also available on our website. Enclosed is a selection of the recipes, we hope you will try them!



## Prisoner work/Prison reform

This past year the VPSG team has been concentrating our efforts on helping vegan prisoners on our list with problems that they have encountered and also on prison reform. Therefore, this is the first opportunity we have had to update supporters. However, we can't stress enough that without your support we would not

be able to stay in existence! Any donation, however small, helps - just like small drops of rain, together they create a pool and then a stream so each and every donation is important to help us continue our vital work!

### Why we need your help

VPSG already provides prisoners on our list with a monthly allowance to enable them to purchase healthy items such as nuts, seeds, dried and fresh fruit, Nut Luncheon or the occasional vegan chocolate bar. These items and many more have been added to canteen lists after our discussions with Prison HQ; as well as the addition of two newly approved mail order companies.

#### Making the best of their time

We also try to assist prisoners who would like to further their education by helping them with course fees or relevant study books.

#### Keeping fit

Although we can advise prisons on how to provide a nutritional vegan diet, prisoners need to keep themselves fit by being encouraged to use the gym - this means, where possible, financial assistance is provided to help with vegan gym shoes and appropriate clothing for them to be able to make use of this facility. Time in prison can drag by - as well as studying, what better way than keeping fit!

### Two new mail order companies approved

Honesty Cosmetics (who stock items suitable for both men and women) and Holland & Barrett have now been approved by Prison HQ, so prisoners are able to order goods directly from them.



However, it is not mandatory for prisons to permit prisoners access to these mail order companies and therefore the VPSG is busy networking with prisons on this issue. Prisoners, of course, do try to apply for permission themselves, but we have found that without our assistance their success is very limited.

### Visitors' centres

We have been writing to all Visitors' Centres (which are shops in the halls where visitors can meet prisoners) to encourage them to stock vegan items such as soya milk for tea/coffee, flapjacks, chocolate flavoured soya drinks and vegan chocolate. Several prisons so far have taken up the challenge, amongst them the Visitors' Centres at HMP Downview, HMP Bronzefield, HMP Littlehey and HMP Coldingley. We are planning to write to the rest of the prisons asking them to follow their example. More info in the next newsletter.

### Caseworkers

Volunteers are needed to be trained as Caseworkers due to the volume of calls for help that come to our Helpline from prisoners experiencing problems, possibly with their food, being given permission to have access to herbal remedies etc. etc.

Anyone able to offer help would need to be available during office hours, have their own computer with basic Microsoft Word, e-mail and internet access and general office experience. Should also feel confident (with training) to contact prisons to help the prisoners on a variety of issues.

What does a caseworker do? Caseworkers need to keep in regular contact with the prisoner(s) they have undertaken to help during their sentence. They may need to discuss any dietary shortfalls with the prison kitchen staff, help to implement vegan items on the full canteen listing where their allocated prisoner is being detained and try to sort out any other problem which might require our assistance. Call Jo-Ann for a chat on 020 8292 8325 between 10am-6pm Monday -Friday.





# Vegan Prisoners Support Group

NEWS - Autumn/Winter 2011

VPSG, BM Box 2107, London WC1N 3XX. Tel: 020 8292 8325 Websites: [www.vpsg.org](http://www.vpsg.org) and [www.vpsg.info](http://www.vpsg.info) Email: [info@vpsg.org](mailto:info@vpsg.org)

## CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE

Have a spare moment - why not click on [www.vpsg.info](http://www.vpsg.info) and check out our latest Catering Information Guide 2011/2012. This booklet is provided to every prison kitchen to ensure whichever prison a vegan prisoner arrives at, they have our recommendations handy.

If you also click on "Dietary Guidelines", it outlines our recommendations, and the other tabs show other aspects of our reform.

Prisoners are also provided with both a copy of our Catering Information

Guide and our Guide for Vegan Prisoners as soon as they arrive. During the whole of their sentence we provide them with their own caseworker so they can ask for help whenever they are having difficulties with their diet, hygiene, clothing or footwear.

Even though prisons should now provide a nutritionally balanced diet, we also recommend the following are issued on a weekly basis to try to make sure all their nutritional needs are provided:

### Recommendations

It is recommended that the following be provided each week:

- 3½ litres fortified soya milk (in order to provide sufficient calcium and B12)
- 200g (7 oz) mixed nuts and seeds (including 1 brazil nut or 100g sunflower seeds/day to provide selenium) and 6 walnut halves/day to provide omega-3)
- 255g (9 oz) mixed dried fruit
- 255g (9 oz) muesli with oats
- 14-21 pieces of fruit (including 3 bananas/week and at least one citrus fruit/day)



### Catering Information Guide

Catering for vegans in prison



2011/2012

The Catering Information Guide is now produced jointly with the Vegan Society.



### Guide for Vegan Prisoners

2011

Our Guide for Vegan Prisoners has also recently been revised and is available for viewing on our website [www.vpsg.org](http://www.vpsg.org). This booklet contains information which vegan prisoners will find useful in their day to day lives.

## THANKS

Thanks to all those supporters who keep us afloat and also to The Vegan Society, which have assisted us in updating our booklets. A special thanks to Patricia Tricker, who has given her time to help us proofread our booklets so thoroughly and to Robin and Alison (London Vegan Festival organisers) for their continued support.

# VPSG GUIDELINES INSTALLED IN ALL PRISONS!

## PRISON SERVICE GUIDELINES ON THE CARE OF VEGANS

### BASIC BELIEFS

1.1 Veganism is not a religion but a philosophy whereby the use of an animal for food, clothing or any other purpose is regarded as wholly unacceptable.

1.2 The majority of Vegans reject entirely, anything which has its origins in the exploitation, suffering or death of any creature. An individual may lead a Vegan lifestyle for one particular reason or for a combination of reasons, and this may result in some Vegans being stricter than others in what they deem as acceptable and unacceptable. Vegan beliefs are followed by individuals within various faiths, to varying degrees, and by individuals of no faith.

1.3 Most Vegans will not involve themselves directly, or indirectly, in anything whereby their lifestyle and beliefs are compromised or violated, either for themselves or for others. Throughout their lives, Vegans will seek to sever all links with, and dependencies upon, the use or abuse of animals.

### DIET

2.1 A Vegan diet is based on fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, beans, pulses and cereals. The diet omits all animal products including meat, poultry, fish, sea creatures,

invertebrates, eggs, animal milks, honey and royal jelly. Vegans should not be required to handle such foodstuffs.

Food/drink containing or made with any of the above or their derivatives should not be served.

The Vegan Society can provide helpful

Information on a range of issues including how nutrients are obtained from a Vegan diet.

2.2 Human nutrient requirements, with the exception of B12 can be met by a diet composed entirely of plant foods, but to do so it must be carefully planned using a wide selection of foods.

Fortified Yeast extract is a good source of some of the B-vitamins, including vitamin B12, as is fortified Soya milk.

### PURCHASE OF SUPPLEMENTS AND REMEDIES

3.1 Herbal remedies, dietary, or food supplements of a vegetable or synthetic origin such as Iodine (Kelp tablets) may be requested through the prison shop.

### DRESS

4.1 Clothing and footwear must be from non-animal (e.g. Plant or synthetic) sources. The wearing of all animal fibres, skins and materials

including wool, silk, leather and suede will not be accepted by Vegan prisoners.

### TOILETRIES

5.1 Toiletries containing any animal derived ingredients or where either the product or its ingredients have been tested on animals are totally unacceptable and are not permitted. Therefore, whenever toiletries suitable

for Vegans are required, establishments should make arrangements for such items to be stocked in the prison canteen or ordered in as necessary.

5.2 Vegans should not be expected to use inappropriate toiletries.

5.3 Vegans should not be asked to handle or use substances that have involved animal testing on the product or its ingredients.

### WORK

6.1 Most Vegan prisoners will not wish to be involved in any way in the care of animals on prison farms. Vegans usually choose not to engage in any sport, hobby, or trade that directly or indirectly, causes stress, distress, suffering, or death to any creature.

6.2 Vegans should not be expected to work in a butchery or handle anything of animal origin or content.

## 24 HR EMERGENCY ARREST LINE: 07984 733 008



If anyone you know is arrested and is vegan let us know IMMEDIATELY by calling our emergency arrest line. One of our team will then contact the police station and make sure they know how to provide them with vegan meal(s). We will also fax them a list of 'what to buy' and 'where'. **Remember, waiting in your cell to be interviewed,**

**while hungry and thirsty, makes an unfortunate situation even worse.**

  
24 hr Emergency Arrest Line:  
07984 733 008  
[www.vpsg.org](http://www.vpsg.org)  
[info@vpsg.org](mailto:info@vpsg.org)

Vegan  
Prisoners  
Support  
Group

VPSG, BM 2107, London WC1N 3XX

The VPSG team are also available 7 days a week for prisoners to call to discuss any problems they encounter – e.g. they need vegan work boots so they can apply for a job in the gardens or elsewhere, they are having problems ordering hygiene products from Honesty or healthy snacks from Holland & Barrett.

Also help is often needed when Visitor Centres do not have any vegan goodies for sale or even soya milk for their coffee, so prisoners can only order black coffee! The VPSG team then springs into action to try to sort it out.



## VEGAN FESTIVAL

We hope that if you are going to the London Vegan Festival this year that you will find the time to come and have a chat with the VPSG team.

For more details on the event please visit the London Vegan Festival:  
[www.vegancampaigns.org.uk/festival](http://www.vegancampaigns.org.uk/festival)

WE HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE!

We will also be at Animal Aid's Christmas Fayre also at Kensington Town Hall on Sunday 4th December from 10am-5pm.



# London Vegan Festival

**Sunday 21st August 2011**  
**11am - 8pm**

**Kensington Town Hall**  
**Hornton Street**  
**London W8**

Underground: High Street Kensington      **£2**  
under 16's free!

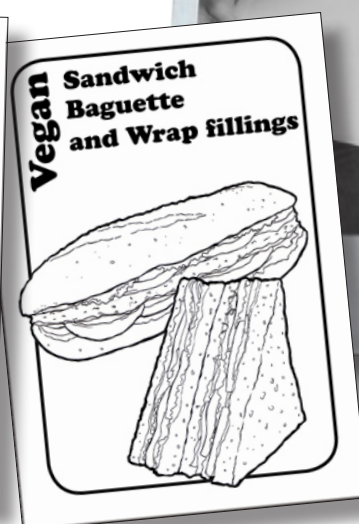
**Food, speakers, music & entertainment,  
children's activities and more.**  
**All are welcome!**

## YULETIDE VEGAN RECIPES 2011 BOOKLET

Our new Xmas recipe booklet will be sent to prisons in September, when it will be available for viewing on our websites [www.vpsg.org](http://www.vpsg.org) (website for the supporters) and [www.vpsg.info](http://www.vpsg.info) (website for prisons and police stations). It contains some tasty and economical recipes for them to consider adding to their menu choices. A copy is also sent to every prisoner too.

A few of the recipes are overleaf in case some of our supporters would like to try them. For those supporters who do not have internet access if they send an A5 sae we will pop the recipes in the post to them.

Our Vegan Baguette and Wrap filling booklet is also free to download from [www.vpsg.org](http://www.vpsg.org) or, if you prefer, send us an sae envelope with a cheque for £1.50 made out to VPSG, and we will send you a copy.



## RECIPES FROM OUR VEGAN SANDWICH, BAGUETTE AND WRAP FILLING BOOKLET

Ingredients	serves 4	serves 10
vegetable oil	30 ml (2 tbsp)	70 ml (5 tbsp)
onion, finely chopped	115g (4 oz)	285g (10 oz)
tomato, chopped	1 medium	2 large
butterbeans, cooked, drained	255g (9 oz)	625g (1 lb 6 oz)
salt and black pepper	to taste	to taste
fresh basil, finely chopped	15g (1 tbsp)	35g (2½ tbsp)

Heat the oil in a saucepan and sauté the onion(s) until soft. Add the tomato(es) and cook for a further 2-3 minutes.

Mash the beans coarsely, leaving some whole. Add to the saucepan and mix well. Cook gently on a low heat for 2-3 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove from the heat, season and mix in the basil.

**Butterbean and fresh herb spread** is delicious on hot bread. try it yourself! (Recipe courtesy of Fairfoods).

Fairfoods are based in mid-Devon and provide vegan food for festivals, weddings, parties, meetings, markets, working lunches or to top up freezers. So if you live near that area why not have a look at their website?



fairfoods  
www.fairfoods.org.uk

Ingredients	serves 4	serves 10
walnuts	55g (2 oz)	140g (5 oz)
water	as required	as required
vegetable oil	15 ml (1 tbsp)	45 ml (3 tbsp)
onion, finely chopped	55g (2 oz)	140g (5 oz)
garlic, crushed	1 medium clove	2 large cloves
mushrooms, finely chopped	115g (4 oz)	285g (10 oz)
fresh parsley, finely chopped	small handful	large handful
salt and black pepper	to taste	to taste

Cover the walnuts with cold water and soak for approximately 1 hour. Drain and blend with half the oil.

Heat the rest of the oil and fry the onion(s) until soft. Add the garlic and mushrooms and continue cooking until the liquid from the mushrooms has been absorbed. Add to the walnuts, together with the parsley, and blend. Season.



## A COUPLE OF RECIPES FROM OUR YULETIDE VEGAN RECIPE BOOKLET

### MINI NUT WELLINGTONS

Ingredients	serves 4	serves 10
vegetable oil	15ml (1 tbsp)	45ml (3 tbsp)
onions, finely chopped	115g (4 oz)	285g (10 oz)
garlic, crushed	2 cloves	4-5 cloves
celery, finely chopped	2 sticks	5 sticks
carrots, finely chopped	55g (2 oz)	140g (5 oz)
mushrooms, finely sliced	115g (4 oz)	285g (10 oz)
red pepper, chopped	115g (4 oz)	285g (10 oz)
almonds, roughly chopped	115g (4 oz)	285g (10 oz)
dried sage or thyme	5g (1 tsp)	12½g (2 tsp)
tomato purée	30g (2 tbsp)	70g (5 tbsp)
salt and black pepper	to taste	to taste
<i>pastry</i>		
plain flour	285g (10 oz)	850g (30 oz)
vegan margarine	140g (5 oz)	355g (12½ oz)
dried mustard	5g (1 tsp)	12½g (2½ tsp)
water	85ml (6 tbsp) approx	200ml (7 fl oz) approx
paprika	as required	as required

Preheat oven to 200°C/400°F/Gas 6.

Make shortcrust pastry using flour, margarine, mustard and enough water to bind. Chill.

Heat oil and fry the onions until soft. Add garlic and fry for a further 30 seconds. Add celery and carrots and continue cooking until soft. Add mushrooms and peppers and cook until soft. Remove from heat and add nuts, herbs and tomato purée. Season and allow to cool.

Cut pastry into required number of pieces and roll each one out to 18x18cm (7"x7") circles. Place mixture in centre of each pastry square. Brush edges with water, press to seal together. Prick top. Place onto an oiled baking tray and sprinkle lightly with paprika.

Bake in the oven for 20 minutes or until pastry is golden.

*Option1: Replace almonds with walnuts or brazils*

*Option2: Roll the pastry into an oblong and when cooked cut into slices.*

**Suitable for freezing**

### CARROT CAKE

Ingredients	serves 9
self raising flour	280g (10 oz)
carrot, grated	225g (8 oz)
sultanas	170g (6 oz)
sugar	170g (6 oz)
ground cinnamon, ginger	5g (1 tsp) each
vegetable oil	200ml (7 fl oz)
water	200ml (7 fl oz)
vinegar	dash of

Preheat oven to 190°C/375°F/Gas 5. Oil a 20x20x5cm (8"x8"x2") tin and set aside.

Mix all the dry ingredients together. Add remaining ingredients. Mix well. Transfer the cake mixture into the tin and bake for approximately 45 minutes. Then reduce oven to 160°C/325°F/Gas 3 for approximately 30 minutes or until a knife comes out clean.

Cool in tin before cutting into squares.

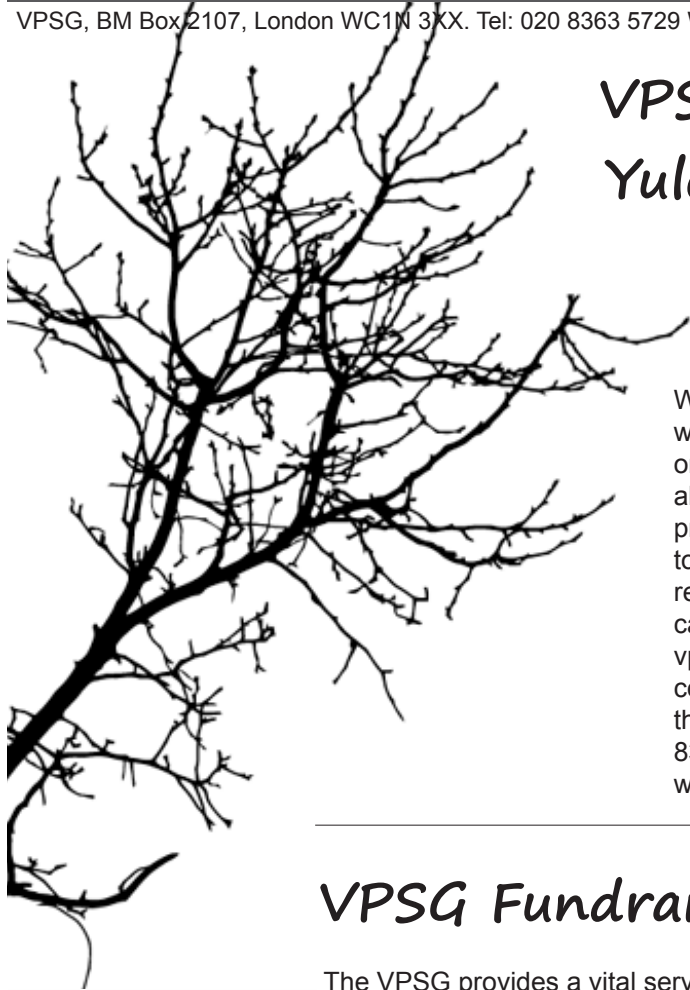
*Based on a recipe from the Cake Scoffer by Ronny obtained from  
www.vegancampaigns.org.uk*



# Vegan Prisoners Support Group

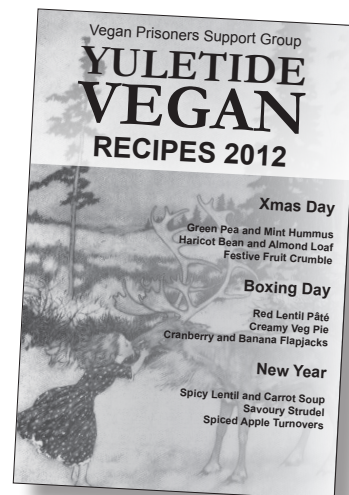
NEWS - Winter 2012

VPSG, BM Box 2107, London WC1N 3XX. Tel: 020 8363 5729 Websites: [www.vpsg.org](http://www.vpsg.org) and [www.vpsg.info](http://www.vpsg.info) Email: [info@vpsg.org](mailto:info@vpsg.org)



## VPSG Provides Yuletide 2012 Booklet To Prisons!

We have provided prisons with a Yuletide Booklet once again this year, and also sent a copy to our prisoners so they can chat to their kitchens about the recipes. The full booklet can be viewed on [www.vpsg.org](http://www.vpsg.org). If you do not have computer access, contact the VPSG office on 020 8363 5729 and a hard copy will be posted to you.



## VPSG Fundraising Appeal

The VPSG provides a vital service to any vegan facing the legal and prison systems - giving important information, essential advice, a 24/7 emergency arrestee helpline as well as continued support and assistance, ensuring the needs and requirements of vegans in custody are met through regular communication to both prisoners and prison staff.

The VPSG has launched a new appeal and needs your help! In order to carry out its work, the VPSG is reliant on all of its supporters as much as prisoners rely on the VPSG. If you can contribute to funds, whether by donating, promoting

or organising an event to help raise money, this will help to ensure the VPSG can continue its dedicated work.

You can donate monthly with a standing order or online via PayPal. If you can organise an event such as a benefit gig, a raffle or be a sponsor for us then do get in touch! We hugely appreciate any support you can give.



## Contents:

- Yuletide 2013
- VPSG Fundraising
- \*Future of the VPSG
- Vegan Visits
- Best Festive Vegan Recipe Award
- Animal Ingredients
- 3663 Mince Pies
- Yeast Extract
- NOMS Guidelines

## 24 Hr Emergency Arrest Line 079 8473 3008

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# The Future of the VPSG – We Need Your Help!



18 years on and all the reform we set out to do is in place in every prison – can we now disband?

No, unfortunately not because even though all the relevant reform/information has been provided to every prison, it doesn't often mean prisons will put it into practise unless one of our team here steps in to assist our prisoners. This means VPSG still needs to be available 7 days a week to step in and fight our prisoners' corner.

However, we can't do it without your help. Funds are needed to pay for the phone and to send nutritional allowances to our prisoners, so they can purchase the products we have campaigned for to be made available via their prison shops.

Additional hygiene/bodycare products can now be purchased through Honesty Cosmetics (who list products

suitable for both men and women), and extra nuts and seeds need to be ordered via mail order. Without extra funds, they would struggle to afford them on prison wages.

VPSG also purchase steel capped boots when prisoners require them to work outside in the grounds, and gym shoes/clothes so they can get some proper exercise out of their cells.

Our prisoner list isn't anywhere as large as it was a year ago, but the ones left still need our help before their release, and we obviously need to be here for any new strict ethical vegan prisoners who find themselves detained behind prison bars.

Currently we provide every prison with a news sheet twice a year when funds are available – this year we only managed to produce one, which has just been dispatched to all prisons and contains our Yuletide Recipe Booklet (available for viewing on [www.vpsg.info](http://www.vpsg.info)). For those supporters without a computer, just call 020 8363 5729, leave your details and we will pop one in the post to you. It contains some interesting recipes you might like to try yourself!

## Emergency Arrest Line – Essential

The VPSG Emergency Arrest Line still needs to be manned 24 hours a day, and without this people who have been arrested can feel isolated and alone. Knowing we have been in touch with the police station reassures them while they are waiting to be questioned.

If the above hasn't explained the importance of WHY WE SHOULD STAY IN EXISTENCE, just call us for an informal chat and we will fill you in!

Jo-Ann

## Vegan Visits

Have you ever visited one of our prisoners and there hasn't been anything in the Visitor's Centre that is vegan other than ready salted crisps and black coffee? If so ask them for details on who runs the shop (usually it is a voluntary organisation or charity), for their contact telephone number and give the VPSG office a call on 020 8363 5729. Once this information is received we will contact them and try to persuade them to add some vegan items.

HMP Send have recently added lots of vegan goodies to share on prison visits, so we have mentioned them in our Catering News Sheet (available for viewing on [www.vpsg.info](http://www.vpsg.info)). The following Visitors Centres have begun supplying vegan products since we contacted them: HMP Bullingdon, HMP Coldingley and HMP Bronzefield.



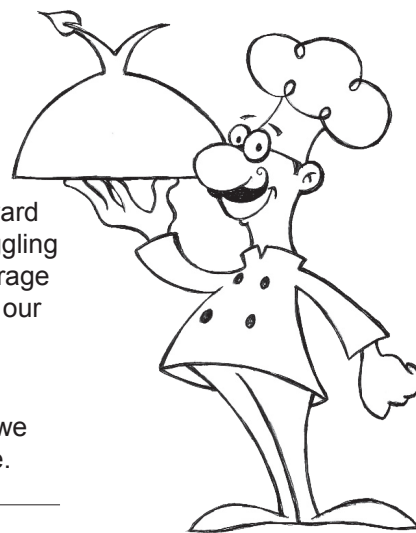
© Prisonimage.org



# Best Vegan Festive Recipe Award

In order to keep the vegan diet in the forefront we have decided to offer an award for prisons to participate in our Best Vegan Festive Award as prisons are struggling with the cut backs in their budgets for prisoners. Hopefully this will also encourage them to provide something a little more special around the 'festive season' for our prisoners.

There have been a large number of new catering managers running prison kitchens so we are reminding them of our recommendations at every chance we can so we have included the following in our latest Catering Information Guide.



## Yeast Extract – To Issue Or Not To Issue!

Some prisons feel that issuing vegan prisoners with sachets of fortified yeast extract (which is a good source of B12) is a security risk! We have therefore, provided them with the manufacturer's assurances:

"There is a commonly held belief that yeast extract can be used to produce an alcoholic drink. There is no factual basis for this belief as it is produced from the spent yeast, which arises as a by-product from the beer-brewing industry."

We therefore continue to stress the importance of providing this item to our prisoners.

## Animal Ingredients In (And Out Of) Prison

Prisons with constantly changing staff often do not know basic animal ingredients in prison products. In order to make sure they have sufficient information we research over 2,000 items on their suppliers list each year and provide this information to every prison. Currently we have researched the following items which some supporters might find useful too!

**Albumen:** White part of the egg. Found in cosmetics.

**Beeswax (E901):** Obtained from the honeycomb of bees. Found in cosmetics, candles, crayons, polishes.

**Carmine or Cochineal (E120):** Red pigment from the crushed female cochineal insect. Found in cosmetics and foods.

**Casein:** Found in milk and all products associated with milk.

**Collagen:** A group of naturally occurring proteins found in animals.

**Gelatine (E441):** Comes from boiling animal skin and bone. Found in foods (as emulsifier or gelling agent).

**Guanine:** Crystalline material obtained from fish scales. Found in

cosmetics and other personal care products.

**Honey:** Bees are farmed and manipulated, and the honey they produce for themselves is taken from them.

**Keratin:** From the ground-up horns, hoofs, feathers, quills and hair of various creatures. Found in hair cleansing/solution products.

**Lactose:** Milk Sugar.

**Lanolin (E913):** Derived from sheep wool. Found in cosmetics.

**Propolis:** A resinous substance collected from various plants by bees. Found in toothpastes, shampoos, deodorants, supplements.

**Royal Jelly:** Secretion of the throat glands of the honeybee workers.

**Shellac (E904):** Obtained from the bodies of the female scale insect. Found in foods, wood/plaster coatings, electrical insulation, sealing wax.

**Tallow:** Rendered beef or sheep fat. Found in wax paper, crayons, margarines, paints, rubber, lubricants, personal hygiene, cosmetics.

**Vitamin A (retinol):** Derived from fish-liver oil or egg yolk. Found in shampoos, shaving soaps, creams, food supplements.

**Vitamin D3:** It is derived from lanolin (from sheep) or fish. Found in milk fortification, dairy products, cereals.

**Whey:** From milk.

### Animal or Vegan Ingredients include:

**Glycerine:** It can be animal, vegetable or synthetic.

**Lecithin (E322):** Obtained from eggs, nerve tissue, blood, milk and soya beans (when stated Soya Lecithin), found in cosmetics, personal hygiene products, foods, medicines.

**Mono- and diglycerides (E471):** It can be from animal fat or plant origin, found in foods, non-dairy coffee creamers, cosmetics.

**Oleyl alcohol or Oleic Acid:** Obtained from various animal and vegetable fats and oils, found in foods, personal hygiene products, cosmetics.

# Everyday Mince Pies And Walkers Crisps Are Vegan

Good news for prisoners; this year the prison's suppliers are listing Everyday Mince Pies which our research shows are suitable for vegans so they won't miss out this year.

*"I can confirm that the 3663 mince pies codes 83451 (Everyday Mince Pies), 50298 (Deep Fill Mince Pies) and Walkers Crisps Ready Salted Packet 34.5g code 695, are suitable for vegans."*

Theo Anjorin, Food Category Team



## NOMS Guidelines On The Care Of Vegans



### Basic Beliefs

1.1 Veganism is not a religion but a philosophy whereby the use of animals for food, clothing or any other purpose is regarded as wholly unacceptable.

1.2 The majority of vegans reject entirely anything which has its origins in the exploitation, suffering or death of any creature. An individual may lead a vegan lifestyle for one particular reason or for a combination of reasons, and this may result in some vegans being stricter than others in what they deem as acceptable or unacceptable. Vegan beliefs are followed by individuals within various faiths to varying degrees, and by individuals of no faith.

1.3 Most vegans will not involve themselves, directly or indirectly, in anything whereby their lifestyle and beliefs are compromised or violated, either for themselves or for others. Throughout their lives, vegans will seek to sever all links with, and dependencies upon, the use or abuse of animals.

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### Purchase of Supplements and Herbal Remedies

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4.1 Clothing and footwear must be from non-animal (e.g. plant or synthetic) sources. The wearing of all animal fibres, skins and materials including wool, silk, leather and suede will not be accepted by vegan prisoners.

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